

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS



Community and
Life Experiences Volume 2 (North)



Neskantaga First Nation

JOHN PAUL JACASUM



Ojibway and Cree
Cultural Centre

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JOHN PAUL JACASUM

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to highlight the past and present life experiences of elders and youth in the Matawa communities. This book identifies the aspirations of these communities and reserves as described by the participants. Information found in this book may then be used by these communities and reserves for the future development of cultural, educational, social, and economic activities. This information may also be used to promote greater understandings between the Matawa and surrounding non-Native communities.

Information on life experiences and aspirations was gathered through audio-taped interviews collected from two elders and one youth of the Eabametoong (Fort Hope), Marten Falls (Ogoki Post), and Neskantaga (Lansdowne House) First Nations of the Matawa Tribal Council.

These interviews were developed around three general statements given to the participants:

- (1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.
- (2) Describe your life in your community today.
- and (3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

Following these interviews, community information was researched from a variety of sources. This information was used to complement the collected elders and youth stories and frame their words in context.

The opinions expressed in this book are those of the participants interviewed and not of the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre or the Chiefs and Councils of the Matawa First Nations.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people and organizations who made this book possible. The elders and youth of the Matawa First Nations who participated by contributing their personal stories and sharing their individual and collective hopes and dreams.

Second, the support of the Chiefs and Councils of the Matawa First Nations, who provided their support and commitment for this book, and in making their communities a better place to live.

Third, Vicky Angees, who transcribed the taped interviews in Oji-Cree and translated them into English.

And last but by no means least, the staff of the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre, particularly Diane Riopel who provided administrative support, Kathy Perreault who researched the community profiles and collected the photographs, Jenna Smith who provided production assistance, and Jim Hollander who edited the manuscript and prepared the maps.

To all those who worked and contributed to this book a sincere *meegwetch*.

1

Introduction

The name 'Matawa' was originally chosen by the Chiefs because in the Ojibway and Cree languages, it is used to refer to the meeting of the rivers. All of the Matawa First Nations inhabit areas on or near one of the major rivers that flow in the vast Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

Matawa First Nations Management Corporate Profile

Matawa First Nations Management, was formed in 1988 as a Tribal Council to provide technical advisory services to it's member communities. The Tribal Council has two office locations. The head office is located in Ginoogamang First Nation, while the branch office is located in the city of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Today, Matawa First Nations Management provides advisory services in the areas of governance, finance, health, economic development, education, and technical services. While advisory services are the core business of Matawa First Nations Management, the organization co-ordinates and delivers other programs and services. Other demands are often placed on the organization in times of crisis or when new programs are introduced.

Currently, there are ten (10) communities that are members of Matawa First Nations Management. The communities are dispersed over a very large geographic area. Five (5) of the communities are remote, accessible by air, water and winter roads, while the other five (5) are accessible by highways and close to non native communities. The ten (10) communities include: Neskantaga First Nation, Webequie First Nation, Constance Lake First Nation, Ginoogaming First Nation, Long Lake #58 First Nation, Hornepayne First Nation, Aroland First Nation, Eabametoong First Nation, Nibinamik First Nation and Marten Falls First Nation. All Matawa First Nation communities inhabit areas on or near a major river system.

Over the past 17 years, Matawa has witnessed and experienced many positive and rewarding changes through the growth and development of its member communities.

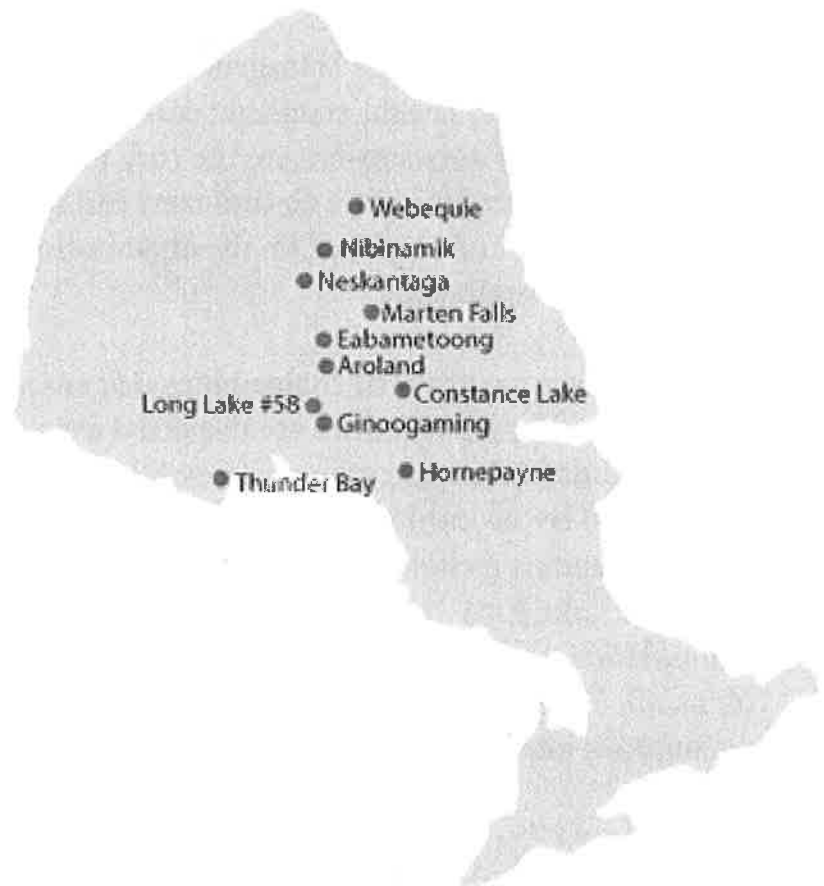
Presently, the communities are at varying levels of development, both economically and socially, and face many different challenges. Many of Matawa's and the communities' past achievements can be attributed to the collective commitment to progress, for the improvement of the lives of members through the delivery of advisory services and other programs and services, developed over a relatively short time.

At Matawa First Nations Management, our strategy is to continue to build foundations for the future. This means evolving and adapting to meet the needs of the member communities, while providing the highest level of service and leadership for all our members.

Matawa First Nations Management Member Communities

The Matawa First Nation communities are situated within the geographic boundaries as described in the James Bay Treaty #9 and the Robinson Superior 1850 Treaty. The total population of Matawa First Nation communities is approximately 7500 people. The current on-reserve populations range from 250 to 1800 and increasing.

In all of the remote communities both English and the local native language are spoken. In the road access communities, some of the younger people only speak English. The preservation and promotion of traditional native languages and culture is a priority in most of the Matawa First Nation communities.



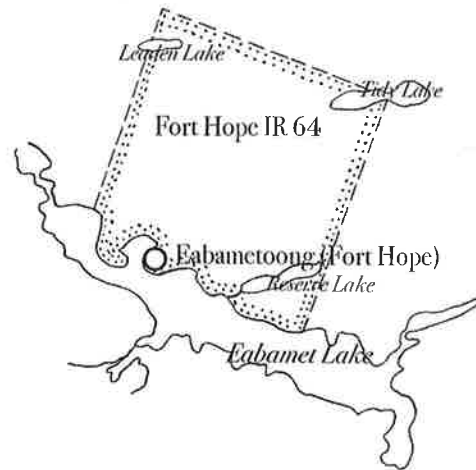
-from

<http://www.matawa.on.ca/>
 [Matawa Tribal Council
 Website, 2006]

2

Eabametoong First Nation

P.O. Box 298
Eabamet Lake, ON
P0T 1L0



The Eabametoong First Nation is located on the Fort Hope Indian Reserve 64. Armstrong, the largest nearby center, lies 155 kilometres southwest of the Fort Hope Indian Reserve. This reserve is approximately 55,900 hectares (216 square miles) in size. This reserve was set aside as part of the James Bay Treaty (Treaty #9) signed on July 19, 1905. The original site of the community was near a Hudson's Bay Company trading post established in 1890 approximately 6 kilometres southwest of the present community. The new community of Fort Hope was built in 1982 and given the official name of the Eabametoong First Nation in 1985.

Population: 2,141 registered band members with 1,161 people living on-reserve (June, 2006)

Schedule of Reserves—Treaty No. 9—1905

Fort Hope

“In the Northwest Territories, beginning at Kichesagi on the north shore of Lake Eabamet extending eastward along the shore of the lake ten miles, lines to be run at right angles from these points to contain sufficient land to provide one square mile for each family of five, upon ascertained population of the band.

—from *The James Bay Treaty (Treaty No. 9)*, 1964, pp. 11

Languages: Ojibway and English

Eabametoong is a traditional name which means "the reversing of the waterplace." Each year due to water runoff, the water at Eabamet narrows which flows into the Albany River, reverses the flow back into Eabamet Lake for a short period of time. Before the fur trade, the people of Eabametoong lived at Eabamet Lake in seasonal locations because of the abundance of fish such as sturgeon, walleye, and whitefish. When the fur trading post and the missions were built, more people were drawn to take up residence close to the "Fort Hope" site.

—from <http://www.eabametoong.firstnation.ca/> [Eabametoong First Nation Website, 2006]

Eabamet Lake House (Fort Hope) was "an old Northwest post ... shown on Eabamet Lake in the Albany River district, probably built before 1800. It was succeeded by the Bay Company's Fort Hope, located a few miles farther north on the west shore of the lake."

—from *Canada II The Owners of Eden*, p. 119

"Before the reserve was created, Eabamet Lake was the site of an important Hudson's Bay Company post where the band's ancestors traded their furs for European goods and supplies. When the heyday of the fur trade had passed, the people began to settle near the post, and by the midpoint of this century it was a tiny collection of makeshift log houses and shacks. The original townsite, which was located on the south shore of Eabamet Lake, was moved to its present location in 1962"

—from *When Freedom Is Lost*, p. 5

Ellen Neshinapaise

(recorded March 3, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Ellen Nellie Nora Neshinapaise
Date of Birth: November 3, 1936
Place of Birth: Bushtown
Present Address: Fort Hope
Maiden Name: Spade
Name of Spouse: David Neshinapaise
Number of Children: 7
Grandchildren: 15
Great-grandchildren: 7
Number of Years Married: 23
Education: 1 year Residential School, Sioux Lookout
Interests/Hobbies: Sports and Hockey

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I was born in a place called Bushtown just outside Fort Hope in 1936 during fall. I don't really know very much about the old days but I can only tell my story from what I remember as I was growing up. It wasn't anywhere near like what it is today. The people in those days mainly lived on things from the land and I grew up with that kind of lifestyle. The kind of life that people had was very different compared to what it is today. I was there during that period of time when everyone worked hard to sustain themselves by trapping and hunting.

Dogs were used for transportation and they were highly regarded as workers. When our dad passed away while we were still small and my mother was alone to take care of us by herself. We had to start learning how to do our share of work to help her. When we knew enough to do chores, my mother began to teach us by showing us and telling us all we needed to know about survival skills as well as life skills that would stay with us into adulthood. Our mother brought us up by herself and she worked very hard to take care of us. I learned quickly to adapt because of the conditions we were in and it was very hard at times. We were in Fort Hope as I was growing up and people always moved around back and forth as they were working for their survival by hunting and trapping. Today people just stay in one place. We moved to our trap line every fall and we came back

after a couple of months to our house here in Fort Hope. We headed back out again in early spring to our trap line to do our spring trapping for beaver and muskrat. By early summer we came back to the community with our pelts to get some money from there and that's how we were able to buy food to eat. I'm not sure if the welfare system was in place during the time I'm talking about. We didn't stay in the community every summer but once every other summer we stayed here. Most of the time, we moved to a place where we commercial fished for sturgeon. We got some money from there too. We were always traveling and camping all around the lakes where the river is situated. We never stayed in one place for very long. Sometimes we remained in the community so we could attend school. My mother used to do laundry for the store manager and the priest who were in the community. They were also our teachers. That was another way my mother made money to feed us.

Life was very hard at times in those days, but there were times when we had plenty of food to keep us going. Other times we hardly had anything to eat. Sometimes animals were scarce at certain times of the seasons and that's where we really felt desperate when we got hungry. It used to be such a happy moment when someone finally got an animal so we could eat again. I think about this often while I'm sitting in my home with nothing to worry about where my next meal comes from and how it was when we had nothing at all. But we always got by somehow. I think about how good freshly killed moose meat used to taste after being hungry for so long. People spent their time hunting for food and nobody ever sat around doing nothing back then. I learned everything from my mother. She used to do beadwork. We learned that from her too. She made all kinds of clothes like jackets, mittens, and moccasins. People always bought them from her and that's how she got money too. Back then things didn't cost very much at the store, yet when they sold their pelts or worked that didn't amount to very much either. In spite of the hardships we had a good life when we were kids. We played all kinds of games to occupy ourselves. When we were playing we copied what we saw our mother does like cooking and preparing food. We would pick leaves and pretend we are smoking fish or we would string them together as if they are geese. We used dried up pieces of wood as moose when it's being brought home. We made our own dolls from pieces of cloth. We never had any store bought expensive toys that the kids have today. We made toys with our own hands. Today when you buy things you never have any money

left over to buy other things. I wonder about what's going to happen later in the future. The way it is today, I think it's only going to get worse for everybody. We never had any issues that would cause us to be unhappy before. It's not like what's happening to young people, they have so many problems today. During our childhood we were content within ourselves. We never ran out of things to do while we were living out in the bush, even if it was just walking around the shoreline and being happy kids.



Waboose Toys & Convenience Store

Just about everything that grows in the bush was used but we don't touch anything from there anymore. We ate all kinds of berries that grew around here, but even those things people don't care about them now. Sometimes I talk about what we did in the past to the young people. We turned away from the things that were important to us back then. We don't use the gifts that were given to us by the Creator. We were meant to live this way, but we have since rejected our purpose in this land.

Going back to things that grow in the bush we had all kinds of edible berries and some of them are not. I grew up watching what adults picked for food, what kind of plants they used for medicine, or even what to use if they got hit with something or got a cut or burn on any part of the body. We don't see anybody using that anymore.

During early summer when the plants are turning green we would go look for birch trees and poplars so we could peel off the bark to drink the sap off them. That stuff is very sweet. Later we would go look for edible berries to eat. Wild carrots and seaweeds also grow in the early summer and that's what we also looked for to eat.

Fish, ducks, and even loons were used for food all the time. Nobody knows how to cook loon today. I witnessed all the things the people did to maintain their livelihood and today I still hold on to these ways. The ways of our people don't exist anymore. I often think about what will happen to the young generation. I'm starting to see what the elders talked about. My father-in-law used to tell us that we will begin to see changes taking place in the near future, especially the things that we used from the land. We won't be able to help ourselves to them unless we pay for it, even water. I see that happening now. He also talked about religion. My father-in-law was a very religious man so he was always warning us to be really careful about the changes. He used his teachings from the Bible where it talks about being very cautious to the changes. I think about these warnings that are starting to take place today. I'm amazed how they knew long before they even began to see the changes happening and now we can see it today. Only those who have the strength to withstand the changes will have the ability to survive through them. Whoever has that wisdom will help their people continue to have a better life.

The only things that I saw people using animal parts for medicine was beaver castor to help extract a boil that causes infection. They also used muskrat skin as a dressing to help with aching muscles or for bruises on the body. I think they also used fish flesh the same way as beaver castor. I don't remember a whole lot about the things they used from animals and fish for medicine. Plants and trees were also used as remedies for many kinds of ailments.

Adults always had all kinds of games that they played. They would try to out do each other by having each person try to break a beaver bone. They used the kind of bone that was hard to break. The other game they had is called *naabahon* to which they would try to see who gets to win. They did all kinds of different things to entertain each other. ... If a squirrel happened to come close to the camp, all the adults would jump up and run around chasing after the

squirrel. They had fun with that. They also got together to have a tug of war and us kids would have our games like hide and seek. We always had adults playing with us too.

I heard the elders talking about the first time the treaty signing happened years ago. The Indian agent as well as the other authority figures would arrive here in Fort Hope every summer to pay out the treaty payment to all the Indians. They came from all around the nearby places like Webequie, Lansdowne House, Pickle Lake, Collins, and some other places to pick up their money. The children used to get immunizations during that time too.

When I was a child, we lived in a dwelling called a tipi. My mother used to gather birch bark that she sewed together for a cover for the tipi. Sometimes we had some canvas before we got ourselves a prospector tent. She also peeled off the bark from these big evergreen trees to use as a cover for our tipi. My mother would lay them flat so they would stay that way after they're dry. Bark was very useful for anything. They were sewed with the roots dug up from the ground. I would always watch her as she was doing her work. I watched her making bowls and baskets from bark where she could store her pemmican. She made a container out of fish skin to put fish oil in. After she skinned fish, she would tie one end of it and then blow air inside the skin and tie the other end to dry. When it's all dried, oil was poured in there. Then she put the oil container into the basket full of pemmican, sewed it shut, and put it away. My mother kept it until there was nothing else to eat. She did the same thing with moose meat like the way you would with fish pemmican. I've watched my mother do that and my mother-in-law too. She was really good at making these birch bark coverings. My mother made lots of pemmican in the fall to help us through the winter.

About basket making, I used to see ladies working on them. I really enjoyed watching them as they were making them. They also made their own fish net. I helped with that as they were working on their nets. They had to make their own floaters and sinkers. Willow bark was used as string to tie floaters and sinkers on to the net. When the willows are getting pliable during early summer we would go pick them by peeling them off the willows, bunch them up together, and put them away until they were needed. We just threw them in water to soak and soften them. [We] used them to tie floaters and sinkers. We always took a

net along with us on a trip. We would just go out on a lake if we wanted to have fish. We ate just about everything from the fish. Nothing was wasted. Even the guts were fried in a pan. That was a favourite treat for everyone and it was especially delicious when the berries are in season. They were mixed into the fried fish guts. That used to be such a treat! We didn't have very much store bought stuff like flour back then. But when we did have some my mother would make bannock. She only gave us a small slice each so that we wouldn't run out too quickly. That's how we were brought up then. It's not like the way it is today, you see a child wolfing down his food whenever he wants to eat. We didn't have the luxury to do that then. We were given equal portions so that we didn't run out of our food. These are some of the things that I lived through as I was growing up. I can't talk about every detail of what I'm talking about especially when I'm being recorded. It's kind of hard to think about what to say. So I'll just continue with whatever I have in mind to talk about. I do have lots of stories I could share but I keep forgetting some of the things as I'm going along.

The other thing I wanted to mention was when a moose was brought home every part of it was eaten except, maybe, the lungs. I don't think anybody ever ate that. Moose hide was never thrown out. It was used in many ways like to make moccasins and lacings for snowshoes. Even deer hide was used for blankets. We don't have deer around here anymore but somebody was saying they saw one recently. I don't know if it's still alive though. I don't know of anybody that knows how to work on moose hide today. A lot of things that we did in the past are no longer with us today. The reason being is that people who grew up with it don't pass on the teachings to their children. I still teach my children some of the things I learned when I was young, like how to prepare animals and fish for food. The other important animal used was the rabbit. Its fur was used to make jackets, hats, and mittens. That's what the kids wore too. It was also our main source of food. Even the intestines were eaten. Ducks and other waterfowl were also used for food. Their feathers [were used] to make blankets, pillows, and even to make padding for a baby's cradle board to keep it warm. Feathers made blankets and pillows soft and comfortable. They found ways to make things useful from anything that they got from animals and everything from the land. This was their main source of life. They never had any garbage outside their place or even around the bush. We see so much of that everywhere we go today. Moss was used for a baby's diaper and when a baby's diaper was thrown out it

just decomposed back into the earth. I used moss for my kids too. I didn't use much of it on my last two kids. I got these cloth diapers when I ran out of moss. All these things that we buy from the stores to keep the babies clean only creates more garbage. These disposable diapers that we use today don't dissolve as they are made of plastic and other things. We didn't have any of the things that just remained in the bush. Even wings from ducks that we didn't use we would just take them to the bush and hang them up on branches. We didn't just throw them out anywhere. Everything was treated respectfully. We threw our scraps or other things we didn't use like animal intestines in a fire to burn them, so they wouldn't just scatter all over the place. That's how careful we were with everything.

Even dogs used for transportation were kept tied up. They were well-taken care of. We didn't just ignore them while they were tied up. We used to cook their food and feed them every day. Today we don't use dogs in that way. There are so many of them running loose in the community and you see the mess they make all over the place. I heard that they pass on their sicknesses to humans if they have a disease. We have all kinds of diseases today. Diabetes is affecting many of our people's lives mainly because they are inactive. Even the food we eat today is making us weak and sick. That's what I see happening to my people.

People were physically healthy and strong because of the kind of lifestyle they had. All they had for food was wild meat and fish. They were always moving around doing things every day. There was probably nothing they could do in those days. Now I see how sluggish and heavy people are when they do something that requires movement. They struggle as they are trying to work.

Some people were big and heavy set but not in a way we see people today look who are over weight with their big bellies. Being fat was very rare then. I don't really recall ever seeing them being overweight but I did notice women that were pretty big. I think that was only because they were always preparing and cooking food. The woman's role was also to stay home, look after their home, and take care of their children. The man went out hunting every day to provide food for his family. If a woman lost her husband then she had to provide for herself and her children. Everybody worked hard and that's the way it was for us too, especially after my father died. I don't remember when he died but it was

while I was sent to residential school with my younger sister. I suffered from loneliness and I was homesick while we were out there. I didn't suffer from abuse that I hear others' talk about but I probably got more abuse from the other students than anything else. I was never abused in any way by the school staff while I was in school. My sister was telling [me that] while she was there all they were made to do was work. They didn't really have any classroom teaching but she learned to work hard from all the work she did. The most awful thing I went through was loneliness. There were many of us kids who were taken away that time, even our brothers. I ended up getting sick from TB (tuberculosis) while I was in school. So instead of going home like the rest of my siblings I was taken to the hospital somewhere down south. When I got better, I started getting tutored right in the hospital. I finally got well enough to go home in 1952. I resumed the way of life that I previously had before I left my home.

There was a custom that every Sunday is the day of the week that we shouldn't work, that it's a day of rest. So my mother always got us to get everything ready the day before Sunday like having a supply of wood and anything else that needed to be done. We took that time to visit with each other and everybody just stayed home from hunting and fishing. They only went out to look for food if they didn't have anything.

They also had their daily prayer services in the morning and evening in the old church that we still have in the community.



St. James Anglican Church

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

When we started living in this community permanently, I began to see changes happening in such a short time. I did my best to pass the teachings I learned from my elders on to my children so that at least they'll know some as they get older. Everything is totally different today compared to what it was as I was growing up. Alcohol abuse is probably the major problem that we have today. I abused alcohol too when I was younger but then I began to realize what it was doing to my life and how much suffering my kids went through when I was drinking. So I made a decision to turn my life around. I didn't get any kind of help to overcome this. What helped me was that I came to recognize the extent of it and I wanted to have a better life while I still had that chance.

Today it is nowhere near like what it was before. It seems like we just exist with no real meaning to life anymore. People aren't treated with respect and they are not regarded as important figures nor do they get support of any kind. That's what I see happening today. Before everybody offered their help and support to anybody who was less fortunate or if somebody lost a loved one. They all got together to be there for that person. People shared with each other even with what little they had. They didn't worry about anything like that because they were strong in their beliefs and that was their nature. Today if someone comes back from hunting with a moose, they don't share their kill with anybody. Before when a moose was brought home, everybody was given their share. Nobody has that kind of sense to be giving to another person. I can only imagine what it will be like in the future. We know that we can't bring the old ways back to the present. If you try to share your life experience with a young person, he or she will cut you off right away with a quick answer. They will say, "that was a long time ago." At least my kids don't do that to me when I talk to them about the past. Kids today think differently too. When we try to tell them something, they don't want to hear it.

I'm starting to see things taking place about what the elders talked about. Life today is very complicated and the kids today are being taken away from their community to be placed in a home that they don't even know. I never saw any of that happening before. Every parent who had kids knew they were the main care givers to the children who were given to them. We are being bombarded by all

the new rules that came from the white society thinking that they are being helpful to us when it's only making our lives even worse.

Another example, we now have running water in our homes whereas before we used to go down to the lake to haul water for washing and washing clothes by hand. Now all we do is throw laundry in and turn on the washer to take care of it for us. So by having all these new things that do the work for us these things only make us more lazy to do anything else. In spite of all the things we have today like electricity in our homes, we end up having to pay for all that. [We] even pay for the house live in. I had to pay for my house to be renovated but I don't mind because at least this way when I pay it all off it will be mine. When we started getting all the luxuries free, we are only getting spoiled from it all. We all just sit around doing nothing for ourselves today. We are depending too much on them but now we are expected to pay for everything. That makes it harder on some people because they don't know how to watch their budget from all the things they now have to pay. We also pay so much for the things we buy from our store. Everything is very expensive here. Still some of us are expecting more help when we can't make ends meet. It would help them some if they knew how to manage their money.



Eabametoong First Nation Housing Authority

Community or reserve life in the future

(3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

There are more changes coming our way with all the things that happened in the old days and up to today. There are more changes coming our way. We can never reclaim our old way of life because we all left them behind. We didn't hold on to them as we were seeing changes taking place. We want to live like a white society and we don't want to acknowledge our own identity. It will get much more difficult for the young people in the future because they don't have any kind of teaching that will carry them through. The only choice they have to make is to try and live in a white world. I can already see what they have to go through today. All they do to keep them busy is by drinking and doing drugs. We also go through all the problems with our children. We don't spend enough time with them to keep them occupied and we don't know how to teach them about life skills anymore. All I can see is that they will lead a different life than the kind of life they are in today.

It seems that we are rejecting our heritage by not following and maintaining our way of life but there are some of us that still knows about the old ways. I'll give an example with my daughter, she got to see some of the old ways as she was growing up and those are the people of her age that still remember some of it. But their kids don't live the way their parents were brought up. Now the next generation won't get to know any of that. The way it was has long been lost. When we started living here permanently, we were still maintaining our traditions like hunting and trapping. We provided for ourselves from the furs that we sold, but it gradually slowed down to a point where nobody does that anymore. People started getting welfare so that gave them a reason not to go out trapping again. Another reason was when the children started going to school full time. That kept them from going out on the land and now the kids don't even want to do that. I remember as a kid how I used to enjoy being out there hunting and trapping and how happy I was when I caught a weasel! But our kids today don't have that in their lives because we didn't take them out anywhere. They only do stuff that puts their lives at risk and they don't know how to value their lives. The only way would be if the parents really worked hard on their children so that they can learn the ways of our people. I know it's mostly our fault for not making an effort to teach our kids today. I do see some of the

young people that are still holding on to the teachings as they were growing up.

We don't have very many elders left today. They are getting old and many of them are passing on. We won't have anyone teaching us about their knowledge.

The other thing that will bring changes is when the highway comes to our community and our land and resources will be taken from us by the mining companies. There will be nothing for our children to use for their future generations. Even if they have jobs they don't want to keep working. The only way out for them is to have jobs but most of them don't care to work.

They are trying to keep the kids busy by providing them with all kinds of sports but that's still not enough because it prevents them from doing other things like going out there and learning how to live on the land. But it is a little too late for them to go trapping because there is no place around here that buys furs. I know you can still send them out to a company that buys furs down south.



Joseph Nate Memorial Arena

I don't know what's going to happen to our people in the future. I can't say but I can only speculate, from what I've seen over the years, how different it is now than what it was like as far as I can remember. I know for sure that it's these things that come from the white society that makes us who we are today. We are

labelled as lazy but we've grown to be accustomed to the new stuff that comes to our community. The government is starting to hold back the funding that was so freely given to us. Now that we are spoiled, we are going to suffer when the government cuts us off the funding. Even medical services are getting to be in such a sorry state whereas before when a patient was taken to the hospital they were well looked after. We are slowly losing our rights as patients to be treated because our status no longer means anything. We can see that everything provided for us is slowly taken away from us.

Kids today are no longer speaking their language. Only those who are older can still speak it. The kids who were born a few years ago are not growing up with the language and they don't know who they are either. I think the young people today believe they are white people and they don't know they are Indian. That's why they don't know who they are because when they are learning to talk the young people only speak English. Even us elders prefer to talk to our kids in another language. Some of them keep using their language to their kids when they talk to them but their kids respond to their parents in the English language. They understand each other but it's just that the kids can't speak the language to their parents. My grandchildren can't speak the language either, when I talk to them they just shake their heads wondering what I'm saying to them. I usually test them if they can understand me because there are teachers in their school who teach them the Ojibway language. I think the teachers just keep talking to them in English while they are teaching the students Ojibway. That's why it's not working. How can they learn the language when it's not being used? We've had a Native language program for a good number of years but it's still not very effective for the students. The teachers won't communicate with the students in just one language. The only thing they can do is read and write in syllabics while they are being taught in the classroom.

There's been too many generations of people who have been using the English language. Over the years it's been gradually lost so the young kids today don't speak it. The young people who are becoming parents today can't speak the language so their kids will only learn to speak and understand English as they get older. That's another part of our heritage that's being lost.

The other thing I notice happening is that when something is started up it doesn't last very long. We've never had any programs like a night school where the young people could go to learn the language. I don't think it would work because they give up too easily. So it would just be a waste of time to run it. Our language is rapidly disappearing and if we try to get it back it will be really hard for the kids to learn it because it's too far gone now. I think they should just continue with Native language teaching at the school but it needs to be improved by having the teachers use one language while they are teaching the students. The parents need to be encouraged to use it more often at home so their kids can pick it up.

Matthew Yellowhead

(recorded March 2, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Matthew Yellowhead
Date of Birth: October 7, 1929
Place of Birth: around the Lansdowne House area
Present Address: Fort Hope
Name of Spouse: Martha Bird
Number of Children: 10
Grandchildren: 60+
Number of Years Married: 49
Education: 2 years Residential School, Sioux Lookout
Interests/Hobbies: Hunting and Visiting

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I will talk about some of the things that you are asking me to talk about. My name is Matthew Yellowhead and I'm from this reserve known as Fort Hope. I was born just north of here. The way it is today was not like that long time ago. Life was really hard back then. I spent my entire life where I was born. I lived in a tipi in wintertime. There weren't very many houses and no village [then].

We trapped and fished most of the time as well as rabbit snaring and hunting for animals. Those are the main things that we had for food in the past. The children who were born a long time ago weren't born in a hospital. They were born where people had their camps in the bush. There were no doctors or nurses to assist in the birth. It didn't matter where they were or what time of the year it was, even when it was bitterly cold. There were some women who were into midwifery and those were the ones who helped a child into the world. Sometimes there would be complications during childbirth but they were able to save both the baby and the mother. The only thing that they had for a baby was moss and rabbit fur to keep them warm. It used to be very cold during the winter months compared to the mild winters we have today. When I go outside at night, I don't hear trees making noise. Before then during winter, especially in the early mornings, all you hear is [a sound] like guns going off. Those noises

are trees making that noise from the cold. You could hear trees all over and that's how cold it was. In spite of that, Native people just kept on living their lives no matter how their dwelling looked. They didn't mind that. Even men who went out to their trap lines stopped out in the middle of nowhere to rest and sleep when it got to be night time. They never had cabins along the way to use for a shelter or even a tent. They just dug around a snow bank and placed tree boughs for a bed. Nothing happened to them being out there in the freezing cold. That's the way it was meant for us *Anishinaabeg* to live. That's the kind of life given to us by the Creator. But now, it's not like that. Today young people want to live the way the white man lives.



Kevin S. C. Sagutcheway Memorial Nursing Station

We all live together in this reserve today and now hardly anyone ever goes outside. Nobody takes the time to take their kids out there. Young people don't have a clue what it takes to be out there as a trapper. They only hear about it. They don't get to experience it because they don't go out. So they have no idea what it's like. It doesn't do anything for them just by hearing stories about these things. Even my ten children don't live like that. They were all born in a hospital. We don't see kids being born in the bush today. Now it's the doctors who are expected to deliver the babies. Nobody uses moss for babies anymore. They use these disposable diapers (Pampers) today. The baby's first food was fish but their food is very different now, baby food that comes in jars and milk.

They never had anything like that for babies before. If a parent today ever tried to feed her baby the way they were fed long time ago, the baby would starve. The parents today don't have the skills to provide and prepare food from the land. I never saw a mother using milk and a baby bottle for their baby. Every mother breast fed their babies. They never had to spend so much on those things although they didn't cost very much back then. A can of milk today is almost \$2.00. I remember a long time ago that it cost 25¢ for two cans. A 10 pound bag of flour cost about \$2.00 but now they cost anywhere from \$18.00 to \$20.00. A pound of lard was 25¢. There was no employment then and there was no child tax benefit. All they got to buy stuff was from selling their pelts and that would usually last them all summer to buy staples. We never had a motor for our boat to get around. All we had to do was paddle wherever we wanted to go. During wintertime we either walked or used the dog team. Today all we have to do is go outside where the ski-doo is waiting, start it up, and away we go. We can easily go as far away as we wanted to. That is our mode of transportation today. We never had anything like that when I was young. I think the people today would be so amazed if they were to see me do the things I used to do long time ago. I know I'm still capable of doing them today. We used to stay nearby the river during summertime to set our net for whitefish. We would pick a spot where the water is very deep and cold. That's where we used to catch lots of fish. Sometimes we caught 100 of them. After we brought fish back to our camp, we would clean them and smoke them over a fire pit until they were dry and cooked. Then we took them down and proceeded to make pemmican out of them. When that was done we put them in a birch basket to use for later. It lasted for many months. That's what we would have during wintertime when food was scarce. They never wasted anything that they killed for food either. The white man thinks that Native people just waste the animals they kill but this is not true. Even when a moose was killed, the meat was hung up on racks over a fire to dry. Then it would be pounded into bits the same way the fish pemmican was made. It also kept well for a long time. So nothing was ever spoiled by preparing any kind of meat that way. Today when young people come home with their kill they just leave it there in the house. They don't know how to clean them, even when they bring home ducks. They only enjoy hunting for sport. They kill as many ducks as they feel like and just bring them home. They expect someone to clean them and they don't even want to eat them. There are only a few young people

today that still eat things from the bush. They would rather eat the meat from a pig or a chicken. That's all I'm going to talk about this.

Did you do any trapping long time ago? What kind of animals did you trap?

Yes. I trapped beaver, otter, muskrat, and mink.

Did you have your own trapping area?

I have a trap line just north of here in Fort Hope. It's probably about 100 miles away. It is called *Wegauses* where my trap line is found.

Did you use anything from the bush for medicine when somebody got sick?

We picked cedar to use for medicine and there is also a certain kind of plant that was used to cure stomach aches. We drank the water after it was boiled with cedar. The other plant used for colds is the wild ginger. They grow by a marshy area along the shore. You have to dig them out and boil them . . . You don't need to drink lots of it and it's also good for bad coughs.

Do you remember anything about treaty when it was signed in this area?

No. I wasn't even born yet then. My father said there were no planes when these government officials first came around to the communities to set up the treaty signing in 1905. They came traveling by canoes through river channels from the nearby town west of here. They came with the other government workers like a Mountie, a doctor, and a priest. They brought with them the new policies that the Native people were expected to follow and these rules were very strict. There was this one young girl who just had a baby and she had no partner. So they went and confronted the young man to marry the girl and take responsibility for his child. The priest then conducted a marriage for the couple. That's what happened when they first came. Before they were married, the police were also involved and told the man if he didn't marry the girl, then he would still have to provide for his child. If he refuses to do that then he would be taken away to jail. There were other rules that were imposed on them. The purpose for that was for them to have a stable life in a civilized manner according to the government's thinking. They were told that stealing is wrong and that it's against the law. Some people used to steal from other peoples' belongings especially their traps, so they were told to return the stuff they stole or face the consequences. That was one of the things they did to tell the people some things that they were

doing was wrong. The doctor also checked them for any health problems and if he thought a person needed medical treatment then it was arranged for them to be sent out. They had to go by canoe to the place where there is the nearest highway and from there they were taken to wherever the hospital was then. They were gone for a long time. Those are some things that happened when the treaty began. Today the four dollars we still get is of no value anymore. We can't even buy one meal with that amount. Back then they could buy quite a bit of stuff for four dollars. I don't understand why the leaders don't try to convince the government to increase treaty payments to the Native people each summer, after all everything is so expensive today. I often think about why they don't say anything about this matter. I never hear of anyone talking about this and it would be a big difference if we could at least get \$10.00 each. Those are just my thoughts on that. When I first started trapping on my own I was about 12 years old, everything in terms of pelts was paid at \$4.00 each like mink, otter, and beaver. Muskrats were worth about 10¢ but it was increased to 25¢. Squirrels were worth about 2¢. Today pelts are worth a lot like beaver is probably worth about \$30.00 or \$35.00 each. Otter is worth around \$100.00. So I think it's still worthwhile to go out there and trap to make money. If someone still did that they would be better off in financial terms. If a person were to trap all winter and then sell their pelts when trapping season is over, then they would have enough money to last them all summer.

We also started commercial fishing one summer and we would sell sturgeon. It didn't bring in much pay for these fish at first. I think it was just 10¢ a pound but it gradually increased to 25¢ a pound. We don't do that anymore. I used to do commercial fishing too. I also did some work long time ago.

I don't agree with the way they try to get everybody to take training before they are hired for work. I think that's just a waste of time. We have lots of young people in our community who are between 20 and 25 years of age. If they didn't get some kind of training then they don't get hired. Years ago if there was a forest fire anywhere the MNR (Ministry of Natural Resources) would fly to the community to look for anyone willing to work. They would get hired on the spot and they didn't need to have any training for that either. Today we need to have some kind of certificate [showing] that we are qualified to do the work. If we don't have it then we won't be accepted to work. That really puts our people at a

disadvantage when it comes to work. We weren't expected to have that back then. All that was required was to be old enough to work and . . . follow the rules in the work place. I never received any training when I started working at the mine. I was about 25 when I began working there. It didn't take me long to know how to do the job there. I went down to about 29,000 feet under ground and I never got into any problems. Today it's not like that anymore.



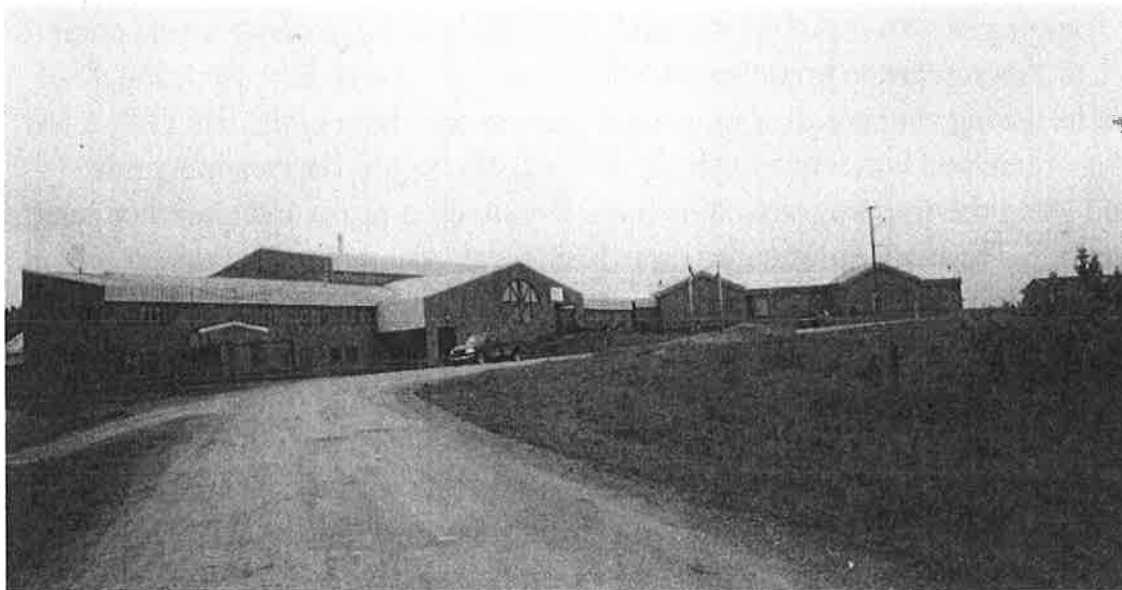
Mang-Otawin Centre

The other thing that I see with these young people today is that they can't hold on to their jobs very long. Once they get paid they just use their money for drinking so they don't bother going back to work or they get let go. That's the problem they are facing today. People didn't drink back then and they always had money to help them survive. It doesn't seem that long ago when Native people were allowed to start drinking and go into bars just like everyone else. Before that happened nobody was allowed to bring the liquor into the reserve even a non-Native person. The law still says we can't have that in our communities but it's getting very hard to get the people to follow it. So we are just letting it happen because we don't know how to deal with that kind of problem.

How was Fort Hope a long time ago that you can remember?

As far as I can remember we always stayed in our trap line all winter. Just before

the trapping season ended which was usually on June 10, then we would come back to this reserve to bring in our pelts to sell. We stayed here for a couple of months during summer then we headed back to our camp in the fall. Only a few people remained here but everybody else left. We would start trapping once again when the trapping season opened. Eventually a priest and a teacher came here to this reserve. So when we came back for the summer, we attended school. But we didn't have to stay here to go to school during winter. Soon after, the school was opened year round and the parents had to stay in the community so their kids could attend school. They were basically stuck here because of their kids going to school full time. The parents couldn't leave their kids behind go out to their trap lines because they didn't have anybody to take care of the kids in the community. That's one reason why they stopped going out to their camps. They had no choice but to stay in the community. I know of some kids back then when they were sent out to residential school. The kids that finish grade school here are sent out to high school in the city but most of them don't last very long. They end up quitting. They can't cope in a strange place so they get into things that create problems for them. The way it was long time ago, they never had to worry about their kids being out on their own. They knew that they were okay being out in the bush with the whole family. That was their home. When they came back to the community they just pitched their tents and stayed here for two months out of each year. That was only their temporary home here. There weren't that many houses then. Later Indian Affairs began to offer funding to the community so that houses could be built for the people. Soon after that, the first school was built. At first there was just one teacher who came to teach at the school but as the years went by more teachers came. A new and bigger school was constructed to accommodate more students and the [community] now has JK up to Grade 9. When they complete Grade 9, they have to leave their community to go to high school in the city.



John C. Yesno Education Centre

I think I only went to school for two summers here and the same goes for the others who are the same age as myself. We didn't get any schooling. I picked up some English by listening to non-Native people when I started working. I did all kinds of work during my younger years, I worked for the store and I worked at the hospital and at the mine. I trapped every winter and did commercial fishing every summer. I was good at working anywhere. I used to paddle in my canoe when I traveled. I never had to use a motor to help me get around. I traveled in any kind of weather. I used to carry supplies through portages when I went somewhere. Even when I helped with store supplies from Fort Hope to Lansdowne House by boat we had to carry them through so many portages

Was this reserve here all the time?

The first time they made a reserve here was when the white man came, I guess back in 1905, when they made a reserve here. Nobody was staying here and many people were from here but they always moved away. There are some people who moved away to Webequie, Lansdowne House, Summer Beaver, and even some of them moved to Thunder Bay, Geraldton, and Nakina. There were lots of people that are from here originally and they were registered under the Fort Hope band.

When did you stop living in the bush and begin living here in town?

When I started having children because they had to go to school here and I couldn't take my children in the bush. I made a house here to live in with my family so our kids could go to school. We were told that if we didn't have our kids attend school then our family allowances and welfare would be cut off. That was the other reason people stopped going out to the bush because by then people were starting to depend on those handouts from the government.

When you were trapping a long time ago did you make any clothes from the hides of animals?

Yes, we made rabbit skin jackets, mittens, and shoes. The women made moose hide to make moccasins and pants, and jackets from deer skins and even beaver. We used that to make something to keep us warm in the wintertime.

Did you always live in a tent a long time ago?

Yes, in the summertime we lived in a tent. We also lived in tipis. We used moss on top for a cover and the tree branches on top [of them]. That was our winter dwelling. We moved around to other places even in the wintertime. We just had this canvas that we used to cover our tipi.

Was there always lots of food a long time ago?

We had lots of food like rabbits, partridge, beaver, moose, caribou, and deer.

Did anybody ever go hungry?

No, but sometimes that happens when you didn't catch anything. We got hungry.

There wasn't very much sickness long time ago. Nobody got a bad cold. Sometimes I heard of one person who died but it is not like today where almost every day someone dies of sickness.

... I didn't see it myself but they used a boat on the Albany river and they went up to Moosonee. Maybe [it took] one month or almost two months when they came down very slow just using a string to pull the boat and bring the stuff over here. I don't know how many boats maybe three or four boats once. It was hard work, [there was] no plane then. Then after this side [around the] Pickle Lake

area they came from there in smaller boats to come this way to bring in supplies, just main items like tea. That's what people really liked.

Did you drink tea broth?

That's what we had too sometimes before I went to sleep. I had some for breakfast. I used oats or flour when I go walking in the bush. When I stop and make a fire, I make some tea there, tea broth.

When you eat wild meat did it make you feel strong?

Yes. Today I know old people are strong not like us. I can't even lift one hundred pounds myself. But long time ago old people when they were carrying loads of stuff, they carried seven hundred pounds. One guy carried that much on his back. They were very strong because of the kind of food they ate. These old Indians were very tough. When they started eating white man's food it started to make them weak. That's what happened.

They never used a motor to go through rapids. They would just carry the canoe along the shoreline by the rapids. Two guys would carry the canoe, that's how heavy it was. They went back and forth to carrying stuff to the other side of the portage. [There were] no planes, just people carrying everything wherever they went.

Did you do a lot of walking in the bush?

Yes, once, my father told me people used to walk from Fort Severn and from Big Trout Lake. They all came to these reserves just by walking. All they had was their sled with all their stuff in there. They were walking to Nipigon in the wintertime. Lots of people did that a long time ago. Even people from Pickle Lake came this way to join those people who were going to Nipigon to sell their furs there. They went to Nipigon to sell their furs once a year. That was before the trading post was established here in Fort Hope. They didn't have dog teams. They just pulled their own sleds.

I never heard anybody to talk about that on Wawatay radio. They never mentioned those men who traveled to Ogoki. There are no rapids down there just as you go down past it. They would go in a boat and pass by it to get out and come back this way again. I don't know how many guys were in one boat, ten

maybe more, and [the boat had] no motor.

Then we got lots of stuff here in the Hudson's Bay Store. People came from all around to buy stuff in the wintertime. They came to buy things they needed like bullets and other things.

We didn't see any canned stuff then when I was growing up. All we had was flour and oats but I didn't use very much sugar. I used tea. That's that way it was. People worked very hard and that's what made them very tough and strong. They hardly ever got sick either.

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

I'm just basically living on a day to day basis. I don't do any more trapping like I used to. That's the way my life was, trapping, so I could buy what I needed for supplies and food. Today we don't do that anymore. That kind of lifestyle is gone but I think there are only a few that still go out on the land.

Do you still go out in the bush today?

Yes, . . . I can still go out.

What do you do?

I look for partridge and I set rabbit snares. Sometimes I still go out and cut firewood. We used dog teams a long time ago. They can pull anything. Maybe four dogs can pull one moose on a sled. They can pull it home almost like a ski-doo. We used lots of fish to feed the dogs to make them fat and strong. We didn't put too much stuff on the sled that they pulled. Some dogs died of that.



Eabametoong First Nation Band Office

Community or reserve life in the future

(3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

I think our people will have struggles in the community because of how expensive things are nowadays. I never have any money left over after I pay my bills and rent. I'm still paying for my truck too. I am a pastor for this community and that's where I get some money from too. My pastoral work requires me to travel quite often and I don't always know how long I'll be gone.

What are your thoughts about the language, do you think it's going away?

Yes, young people, they don't even know to speak their language. Like these little ones here, they don't even understand me when I speak my language. Even the teenagers don't understand the language. It's the parents that are in their 30s who are using English. They haven't been using the language some of them. Many times I tried to talk to the young people in my language but they don't even understand me. I can't teach them because I can't talk to them.

What do you think could be done to save the language?

I don't know. We do have people that are teaching the language but it's still not enough. I think they don't use the language as they are teaching them and that's why it's not working. I know some white people that can speak seven languages.

They start with their mother tongue but they don't lose it. Then they try to learn another language and when they master it they go on to other different languages. They eventually can understand and speak seven different languages. A white man that I knew from before told me that. He could go anywhere in the world and still communicate with people. That's the way some of them are. The Native person is not like that. If I were taught the other language at an early age I probably would've lost my language too. I don't know if that's just the nature of our people but they can't seem to hold on to their language and their culture. The younger generation doesn't have a clue on how to work on the things we used to do like trapping, skinning animals, and preparing food. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one who still knows how to do them. The other thing is we only boiled food like fish or meat we ate. Today we cook our food differently like frying everything. I don't think young people would find boiled food appetizing. It's almost impossible to regain what we had in the past. The solution would be if people worked really hard to teach the younger generation about the way it was before and reintroduce some of the things used. I'm not too confident if that would work.

Do you think anybody still uses moss today?

No, I don't think so. But moss is good.

I don't have anymore questions to ask you, is there anything else you want to say before we close off?

The only thing that I would like to say is that I think there is still time to teach our kids some of the old ways. I even went to talk to our chief once about this. I was telling him some of my ideas on how we could get started, like for one thing before trapping season opens they could have the people that still know these things to take the kids out for a few weeks at a time to the trap line and teach them about trapping and other survival skills. Even the whole family could go out there so they can all learn about these things. They could even teach the Native language to the kids while they are out there. I think it would go along way if we started on something like this.

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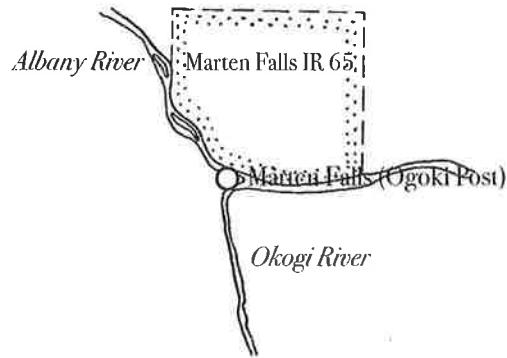
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Marten Falls First Nation

General Delivery
Ogoki Post, ON
POT 2L0



The Marten Falls First Nation is located on the Marten Falls Indian Reserve 65. Nakina, the largest nearby center, lies 170 kilometres southwest of the Marten Falls Indian Reserve. This reserve is approximately 7,770 hectares (30 square miles) in size. This reserve was set aside as part of the James Bay Treaty (Treaty #9) signed on July 25, 1905.

Population: 585 registered band members with 280 people living on-reserve (June, 2006)

Schedule of Reserves—Treaty No. 9—1905

Marten Falls

“In the Northwest Territories, on the Albany river, beginning at a point one-quarter of a mile below the foot of the rapids known as Marten Falls down stream a distance of six miles and of sufficient depth to give an area of thirty square miles.”

—from *The James Bay Treaty (Treaty No. 9)*, 1964, pp. 11

Languages: Ojibway and English

Martin Falls House was “a Hudson’s Bay post built in 1794 on the Albany River, about one hundred and fifteen miles upstream from Henley House.”

—from *Canada II The Owners of Eden*, p. 118

Christine Achneepineeskum

(recorded March 4, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Christine Achneepineeskum
Date of Birth: December 2, 1931
Place of Birth: Ogoki
Present Address: Ogoki Post
Former Name: Coaster
Name of Spouse: Antoine Achneepineeskum
Number of Children: 10
Grandchildren: 21
Number of Years Married: 51
Education: Grade 5, 2 years Residential School, Sioux Lookout
Interests/Hobbies: Tanning Moose Hide and Sewing

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I'll talk about what it was like when I was a child growing up in the bush.

I don't have any thing to say about this community because I don't really know what's going on. But I can talk about what it was like in the past when we were living off the land. During that time we had no government help and I'm sure it was the same for everyone else. We didn't get any kind of assistance as we do today. Most of the time we trapped in order to survive. We worked hard to stay alive. Even the children learned to work as they were growing up. It wasn't easy living out on the land and the only time that we got to eat was if we killed something by hunting and trapping. We hardly ever got anything from the store either. We only went to the store if we had some pelts to take with us in exchange for food and other things. That's how it was for us. [It was] the same with our relatives who lived with us all winter long. My husband's brother's family was there too. We've never had any help from outside like the government's assistance. We didn't have doctors' helping us when our children were born. We had our own midwives who delivered our babies while we were out in the bush. I think I only had two babies who were born in the hospital. I had the others born in the bush with the help of a midwife. All we had for the new baby was a rabbit fur blanket to wrap them in and that kept them warm.

That's how the newborns survived by keeping them wrapped in there. We didn't have very much in terms of material goods. That's what I remember in those days. I'm not speaking for anybody else about the way it was before but that's what it was like for me.

Today I'm very grateful for the things we have and I know I should be because life is so much easier for us now compared to how much we suffered long ago. I don't have anything else to talk about. All I can say is that I'm really glad to see that people here today that are much better off in this life. I don't have any other things to talk about.



Marten Falls

What about the time when you were a child?

I did my share of hard work as I was growing up. My older sister was the one who taught me how to do things and she continued to teach me but I was still a child when she died. I learned lots from her by showing me what I needed to do and how to do everything. She also showed me how to work on the moose hide. I've since learned how to cure and tan the hide. She was still able to teach me to do other things almost right up to the time of her death. She taught me how to make lacing for the snowshoes and how to make moccasins and mittens. I can't even do these things anymore like sewing. I can't really sit up for very long because I start getting a sore back. Sometimes it's hard to straighten myself out after sitting in one position when I'm sewing.

When you were out in the bush what did you use from the animals? Did you ever use any of the plants for medicine?

We never had any medicine from the doctors at that time. It wasn't like the way it is today. We never had to use any of that because we didn't need them. People were strong and healthy back then. We hardly ever got sick.

Do you find that when you eat wild meat that it makes you feel strong compared to store bought meat?

I believe it's healthier for us to eat the wild meat. I hear people talking about certain foods today are not as good for us and the stuff that the animals eat also affects us when we eat that animal. Moose is my favorite food. That's all we had before. We didn't really eat much fish back then. I haven't had sturgeon for a long time now. I still eat moose meat and sometimes rabbit and partridge. I don't eat beaver anymore, and it's been quite a while since I had that. We stopped eating deer meat too. There was one person who was a good deer hunter but he stopped hunting them when we didn't eat it anymore. I still eat walleye but we stopped eating the other kinds of fish a long time ago.

While you were living out there, did you come back this way once in a while?

That's right, we came back once in a while. We always stayed out in the bush. We headed out to our camp in the fall usually during September and stayed there all winter long until the early summer in June. That was our lifestyle then. All we had was a prospector's tent to use as a dwelling. We had an axe and a handsaw. That's pretty much all we had for tools at that time. Life was very hard in those days. It's not like what it is today.

Where did you have your trap line and what were those places called?

We went to this place just east from the community. It's quite close to the neighboring community and that's where we had our trap line. We were there every year during the winter months. We had another family who stayed close by. There was a big set of rapids and we weren't too far from there. We used to get so cold with just a tent for shelter. We used to live right on top of the sandy hill where the poplar trees were growing. There was an old man named Gabriel who stayed with us and he had an explanation about why it was always so cold there. He said that it's these poplar trees that are making this place cold! That

was our main camp in that area. We enjoyed staying there as long as we had food to eat. We always had plenty of moose meat.

Did you have any traditional games back then?

Of course we always did all kinds of games when I was growing up even after I got married. My husband and I would join in the games. Square dancing was one of the popular social gatherings. We used to go where they held dances and join them. There was a place where the other group of people lived and my husband's brother named Willie went with us to these dances. They would have them when the students came back from school as a way of welcoming them and just being happy that they were with us again. There was one man that never joined in a dance. He just didn't want to take part in it. My younger sibling and my husband used to have so much fun. They would just be there among these girls, who were from there, dancing up a storm. That was our fun.

How long did you stay when you went there?

Sometimes we stayed there for about three days. The men used to go moose hunting during our stay there. It only took us half a day to travel to where they had these dances.

Did you travel by foot?

No, the only time that we traveled by foot was when the lakes were shallow or when the rapids were dried up. We traveled a long way to go meet our children and pick them up when they came home from school. Three of my children went away to school. They went to this residential school where the kids used to go. My other kids went to different schools.

Did you have any other games besides dancing?

I don't really remember specifically if they ever had any games. All they ever did was dancing. We didn't have any games then, not like the way it is today. We always see people doing all kinds of games and sports. The only thing I can recall is they used to play cards among themselves. People of all ages even the elders played cards. They would sit around on the grass in one big group. That's all I can remember about that.

Do you remember hearing elders talk about when the treaty signing first took place here?

I didn't hear very much about that. They said that the Indian agent used to stop by here every summer to hand out payments. Even to this day, it still happens. I can't talk about that as I never heard people talk about it.

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

I'm just glad that we were given some basic things for us to live comfortably in our community. I'm grateful to see that the young people are being provided with that so they can continue to use them in the future. I know I won't be there with them as I'm getting on with old age. The elders like myself won't see all these new developments that the young people will get to have.



Marten Falls

Today the children are losing their Native language. What are your thoughts about how it could be preserved?

It's the school's responsibility to make sure that Native language teaching should be included in this community. When I go to other communities I always hear the children speaking it, but around here all they speak is English. That's all they use. They don't understand one bit of it and even though I speak to my grandchildren in my language, they don't have a clue what I am saying to them. They only understand when I speak English to them. We have a Native language

teacher at the school here and I think they are slowly picking it up. If they made an effort it will make a difference because children can learn what they are being taught. They need to use it even in the schools. They don't want to use it because they don't hear it from adults. I believe that would work if they did that.

While you lived out in the bush, did you always have enough to eat?

Sometimes we went hungry especially when the hunting was poor. But most of the time we managed to get by with whatever we caught like rabbits and partridges. When my sons began to hunt, they would go out and shoot partridges for us when we didn't have anything. They started helping us in that way too. There were always plenty of partridges where we had our camp. Sometimes they used to kill lots of them and that really helped us from getting hungry.

One thing that really concerns me, which I never share with anyone, are the children. There are too many dogs in this community that they are urinating all over the place and the children might get sick from that. I had a dog too but I always kept it tied up outside my house. A wolf killed it not too long ago. One of my sons moved him over to his place and that's where he was killed. I'm not very happy about seeing so much mess that they leave around: even outside my doorway. I get afraid the kids will pick up something from there and make them sick. People should be reminded to keep them tied up for the safety of the kids. We all know that kids don't know to be careful. They just pick up snow and eat it. I see them doing that. I'm just voicing my concern about that.

Did you use moss back then?

Yes, I always did. There is a certain kind of moss that we picked to use as a diaper for babies. I was shown what kind to use. It was safe and clean to use on a baby. I always put a cloth over the moss before I tied them up. I also used the cradleboard to keep my babies in. Even as they got bigger I still kept them in there. But as they got bigger it was hard to put them there because they would just wiggle out of there as I was trying to tie them up. Babies were very content when they were kept in there even as they started walking around. We always had to make a bigger one as they were growing. They were safe in there and that prevented them from getting hurt. We didn't have much of a space inside the tent. My husband used to make cradleboards for our kids.

We always lived in a tent even when we moved around. We always took our tent with us.

How did you prepare the meat to make it last?

We made a rack that we got from small trees and made a fire underneath. That's where we hung the meat or fish to dry from the smoke. We usually did that in the fall so that we could keep it for the winter. Then we pounded the moose until it's all ground up. We also cooked moose fat to go with moose pemmican. The men hunted moose in the fall and that's what we did to prepare the meat to use during winter. We did that every fall.

What were your roles as wife and husband?

I always kept a good supply of firewood. I also did all the cooking and preparing food and at the same time I took care of my children. My husband was always gone out hunting and trapping so he was hardly ever home. He would head out first thing in the morning and wouldn't be back until late in the day. Sometimes he would go out trapping. When it was windy, he would be out moose hunting. It was easier to kill moose when it was windy.

Did he sometimes come back with nothing?

That happened every once in a while when there were no animals around.

We had deer in this area at that time and that's what he killed too. We ate that to keep us from going hungry when nothing else was there. There were other groups of people who lived not too far from us. One of the men there, whose name was Patrick, was a good deer hunter.

Those are some of the things we did while we lived out there.

When was the first time you saw liquor being used around here?

It doesn't seem very long ago when that started, but I don't remember people using it before that. I did hear my father talking about how they used to make home brew when he was young. He said there were three of them that used to do that and drink together. He said that they used raisins and yeast to make home brew. It hasn't been that long since I started seeing people drinking liquor.

Is this the original community when it was first established as a reserve?

No, it used to be over by the rapids where it first became a community. Then they moved to this place and we've been here ever since.

Was there ever a flood since this has been a community?

There was never a flood right in the community, just over on the river east from here. The water can get very high especially when the ice and snow start thawing out. Sometimes it would get so high, right up past the shoreline. I only remember one time it got very high but we weren't here at that time. My father-in-law was telling us that even where the ground was high, they were under the water and it looked polluted, but that was long time ago. We see that happening every few seasons when it gets kind of high even where we used to live years ago. It doesn't take long for it to go down again.

Do you think the environment has changed over the years compared to what you knew back then?

I think it is very different today. It's always snowing. I don't think we used to get that much snow before, maybe once in a while there was lots. It used to be like that every other season and we had mild weather in winter. This winter I notice it's been very cold but it wasn't like that last year. This is pretty common. It changes a bit every two years. Even the bugs get that way too, every two years there are lots and then they decline the next time around. We didn't have very many mosquitoes last summer, but the black flies were really bad. I think we will have lots this summer. I noticed that we've been getting these other bugs over the last few summers. They are black and very small. There used to be so many flying around in swarms and I was always afraid to swallow them whenever I walked around. They would just get attracted to people and just fly all over them. People must breathe them in without knowing it.

Do you have anything else you want to talk about?

I don't have anything more to talk about.

Joseph Achneepineeskum

(recorded March 4, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Joseph Noah Achneepineskum

Date of Birth: December 23, 1926

Place of Birth: Attawapiskat River

Present Address: Ogoki Post

Name of Spouse: Elizabeth Moonias

Number of Children: 9

Number of Years Married: 40

Interests/Hobbies: Carving, Basket Making, and Tamarack Bird Making

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I grew up in the bush with my parents. We didn't have anything most of the time and food was always scarce. We never got any kind of assistance from the government. We never got anything from the government right until 1963. My father passed away in 1945. He died in the hospital in Cochrane. His body was never brought back to us, so he was buried there. That's what happened a long time ago. Wherever somebody died, that's where they got buried. We never saw their body being brought back to our place.

As I said before I remember the animals were quite scarce in those days. There weren't very many moose or deer where we were. So we mainly depended on fish to keep us going. Even the fish, there were hardly any in the lakes where we lived. They were mostly just suckers and pikes in those lakes. There never were any whitefish. We did have plenty of rabbits and that's what we lived on when I was growing up. During the spring season my father used to shoot ducks when he was still alive. I don't really have too many memories of him, as I was pretty small when he died. I do remember bits and pieces of what we went through back then, so I won't have too much to talk about the old days. But I had someone named Patrick who was always there to teach me how to hunt moose and other animals. I always went with him on his hunting trips. That's how I

learned to start hunting on my own and where to go to find animals. The other boys that I knew had their fathers who taught them about the skills of hunting and even how to make things like snowshoes. I learned just as much in spite of not having a father to teach me. We only had a tipi that was used as a dwelling and we didn't have one of those prospector's tents yet. We even had a fire pit inside the tipi. We would just sit around inside and where we were sitting we would just lay down to sleep. My father lived his life in a Christian way. He prayed with his family every day, [it was the] same with my mother. We were expected to sit still and listen while he was conducting his prayers. We always lived in peace in spite of having to struggle to survive. Our parents taught us well: how to live our lives and how to be independent. When I became old enough to start hunting, I practiced on squirrels. I gradually went on to other bigger animals like a weasel and a mink. Those were the things that I practiced on.

There was a Hudson's Bay trading post not too far from this reserve east of here. There was this white man who looked after the store. He was there for quite a long time and then other new store managers started coming to relieve each other. Some of them stayed on for a few years. That's where I took my pelts so they can buy them. I had all kinds of pelts like mink, otter and beaver but it wasn't much worth back then. One time we got eight dollars for a mink, 16 dollars for a beaver or 20 dollars if it was in its prime.

Every fall we headed out to our trap line in Lansdowne House and then towards the end of November we came back this way. Just us men would travel back to bring our pelts so we could buy food and supplies from the store. After that we headed back to our camp again. We would return again just before Christmas and stay there during that time. We had a Catholic priest who stayed in the community year-round. He used to visit the other community to go do his service for the people there. We always had Anglican priests who came to visit our community occasionally but they didn't stay here very long. We never have priests coming to our community anymore. But we always had a priest present here. Things are different now. I don't mean it's going different for the better. Children were always baptized when our priest was here. Now when the priest comes here, he doesn't want to do that, even our priest. I think the way they run their service is far different now than it used to be. They don't perform

marriages anymore. Most couples today are not legally married. A long time ago when a man wanted to live with a partner, they got married right away. Nobody was allowed to live together until they married. I saw people getting married by a priest who was here all the time. But that doesn't happen anymore.

I encouraged one of my sons to get married before he started going around with a girl. The purpose of that is to gain a better life on this earth as well as the other life that we hear about. But it doesn't mean anything to the people nowadays. Part of the problem with that is because there is no longer a teaching about marriage and what it's all about. I'm part of the blame too, because I didn't teach some of my kids about the importance of marriage.

Going back to my story about trapping, we remained in our camp and went around our trap line every day. Sometimes we hardly ever saw any animals. We never had marten where we trapped, there were mostly just beaver, mink, and otter.

The young people's lives today are very different. I can't even communicate with my children because they only speak English. My older kids who grew up in the bush didn't lose their language. It's my younger kids who don't speak it. When my younger kids were still small we moved to a place called Calstock because it was hard to get by where we were. They used to walk about a mile to go to school where we moved. We had no hydro either. Only the school had a power generator. We used a wood stove to keep our house warm. We never had a ski-doo until 1973 when I started seeing them. People just walked when they traveled. We also had dog teams for transportation. All those new things that came along didn't cost too much. I think a ski-doo cost about seven hundred dollars. Today it's very expensive and they break down easily. But back then they were made to last. I was hired to work where the highway was constructed. I worked there for about three years. I didn't get paid much. I think I used to make five dollars a day. But later they increased the pay to seven dollars. I always looked for work while we were living in town. One time I worked for a logging company and then at a shop where they made the vehicles. I got paid three dollars a day there and I was there for about a year. Then I went back to work on the highway and the pay was getting better. That was in 1976. There wasn't any social assistance a long time ago so we had to find ways to feed our family. We

didn't have that until 1963. I heard elders talking about the treaty signing back in 1905 and how they were promised financial help in return for agreeing to share their land and resources. But that took a long time coming and we continued to struggle to survive until we started seeing some of these promises starting to take place. We weren't the only ones going through hard times. I even saw white people struggling when I worked down south. They had horses though. All they had were the handsaws and there wasn't anything like power tools yet. That's what we used when we cut cords of wood for the logging company. We got six dollars a cord.

The babies were born in the bush and the parents took care of their own kids. We used moss for a baby's diaper. The mothers always breast fed their babies and that's what my wife did too. They also fed them solid foods as soon as they learned to chew. They were given broth to drink. The ladies used to gather moss and hang them to dry before using it for the baby. The moss was gentle enough even for newborns. They never got a skin rash from it. That's what we used on our kids. We never once used those diapers that they use today. It was used like a disposable diaper that you just throw away after one use. But we didn't have to pay for them, not like the way it is today and how expensive they are.

Do you remember when the treaty signing first came to your community?

I wasn't even born yet. They say it was back in 1905. Even these old people like John Ash[neepineeskum] said that he doesn't remember it either but his mother told him that she remembers her parents talking about the event. She said she heard them saying [that] when those government workers came they all sat down to discuss their intentions with the Native people. They talked for three days. Finally, they were told that they were going to get help in return for sharing their land and that the promise would remain as long as the river flows and the sun shines. But what they were promised didn't happen for a long time. We are just starting to see that taking place. I'm finally seeing these things like medical help and houses to live in. Some years ago the houses were built maybe twenty at a time and nobody had to pay to live in them. Today we have to pay to live in band housing every month. But even before that time we had no electricity or plumbing. We hauled water from the river to use for drinking and other things. We heated water on the stove to do laundry. The only time that we took a bath was during summer when the lake wasn't too cold.



Marten Falls Nursing Station

How many siblings did you have?

There were three of us boys and three sisters. One of them passed away so there are just five of us today.

My father was a medicine man while he was alive. When I was a child I got burned really bad while we lived out in the bush. I was too small to remember vividly about it, but my father healed me. He used the birch tree to make medicine from it. That tree has a very powerful medicine in it. If someone had these bad sores on their skin, it was used as a dressing to help the sores clear up. It's good for infections too. One time I had infection on my knee, but I just ignored the pain and continued to work. I was working on housing at that time. So I didn't look after myself and it got worse. Then one of my father's brothers went out and got the bark from that tree and scraped off the inside of the bark. Then he put it in a pan to boil the inner bark. After that he took it out, bit a chunk off, and chewed it up. After he chewed it up to make enough he put it on a piece of cloth. [Then] he applied it to my knee and got another cloth to tie it on and keep it there. We didn't have any bandages at that time. What the bark does when it's applied to sores or infections is that it sucks out all the bad stuff and it goes to the bark away from the skin. That's how helpful that tree is. So he changed the dressing twice and it didn't take very long for the infection to clear up. I couldn't even walk, that's how bad it got infected.

I also broke my leg when I was a child and of course my father took care of that too. It was suggested that I get sent out to the hospital so the doctor could amputate my leg, but my father said no. So . . . he cut a tree and carved it just so that my leg would fit in there and [then] he just tied it to keep my leg straight. A month later I was able to start walking again. That's all he used to help my leg heal. He didn't give me anything else like something to drink (medicine water). I still know some of the things that were used for medicine to heal anybody. They really work. I saw my father practicing that to help his people. One time my wife was told that she was diabetic when she went to get a medical check up. So I went to the bush and gathered the plants from there and brought [them] home to make the medicine for her. I would just go out to the bush without even knowing what I'm looking for. But then the dream I previously had came back to me and I was shown what kind of plant to pick and use that to help my wife. I was given a gift with dreams. That's where I got the teachings [about] what I should use when I go searching for plants to use for healing. So then I made the medicine from the plants for my wife to drink. I made two batches and she continued to drink it until she finished it all. Then she went back for a medical follow up and it was discovered that she didn't have diabetes anymore. Another time she became sick with diarrhea that wouldn't clear up. So I went out again to look for something to help her get better and it did. She hasn't had that problem ever since. I have that gift to heal certain ailments even when someone has a toothache. I know what to use to help get rid of the pain. So if you should have a bad toothache tonight come and see me!

I never used anything for medicine from the animals. The only thing used was the mink fat to rub on dry cracked hands or sores. That was one of the things they used long time ago. The other thing I was told that was used was beaver castor but I never tried it yet. If someone got a splinter, it (beaver castor) was applied to it and it would cause the skin to get all soft and mushy like a prune. That made the splinter come up where it went in. They would leave the dressing on half a day or overnight. Then when it's removed, the splinter would just slide out. Cedar and choke cherry trees were used to help get rid of colds, but what I did was use three or four other different kinds of plants to make medicine like the Labrador tea and the wild mints that grow on muskeg. I boil them together in one pot. You put about half a gallon of water and put lots of those plants that I already mentioned. It was also good to drink that when you had trouble

urinating. The plants that were used for any kind of sickness really helped people get better. Spruce cones were used when you have a chest cold with coughing and a scratchy throat. You take two of the cones and drop them in your cup, pour hot water on them, stir it, and drink it. It will calm your cough. Those are some of the things that I've been using since I've been young. There are other people that tell me they still know about the things that were used before.

Dogs were used for transportation when I was living in the bush. We only kept three dogs for a dog team because we didn't have very much food to feed them. We had to keep them well fed so they could be strong enough to pull the sled. Dogs were very useful in that way. Today we don't use dogs to work for us. The other thing we did was train our dogs to help us when we went out moose hunting especially during early spring when the snow was hard enough to walk on. We used to get them to run after the moose in the direction where one of us was waiting. That was another thing the dogs were used for.

How long have you been carving?

I just started doing that ever since I quit trapping maybe about ten years now.

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

I don't really have too much to say about that. I don't think it's all that bad now considering all the things that are provided for us, especially us elders. We get old age pension and that helps make it easier for us today. We get by with what we get because I try to be careful on how I spend my money and make sure I don't run out until my next cheque comes in. If we don't watch how we spend it then we only make it harder on ourselves and that's what the young people today do. They get very extravagant with their money. They don't even think about how they are going to buy their next meal. I remember people used to get welfare every two weeks but that's been stopped. I think it all had to do when people didn't use their money on things they were supposed to buy. Some people don't know how to watch their spending and that only creates more problems for them. When people were still providing for themselves by trapping, they didn't receive any assistance especially the couples that didn't have any kids. Some of them did get welfare or if they were taking care of an

elderly parent. I know lots of people abuse the welfare system by claiming they were too sick to provide for themselves just to get money for things other than stuff they really need. We all need spend the money wisely that's given to us like when we go to the store. We should only buy things we need. I'm in a situation where I have to take care of my grandchildren because their parents don't provide them enough to get through. They don't look at their children's needs as they would rather spend their money on other things. My younger children are more responsible and I don't have to worry about them going without because they know how to take care of themselves. Two of them are the ones that are into drinking and that causes them a lot of problems.

The other issue that I see happening today is with the young people who have partners. I'll give myself an example. All these years that I've been with my wife I've never tried to control her in any way. If she decides to do something that she thinks is right then I give her my support. I have always treated her equally and never once thought of her as someone who's less important than me. I always helped her with chores, even with something that may seem she could manage easily by herself. I used to help her by keeping the kids busy while she was cooking and doing dishes. I see young couples today when one of them just takes off on their partner to go out drinking all night. When that partner is being left behind, they get hurt. When they eventually go home after they're done then that's where the problem stems from. Everything in their relationship is affected by the lack of consideration for their partner. When drinking is involved, it makes it even worse. They end up having a dysfunctional relationship within the family as well as financially. I guess just about every young person goes through their lives in that way nowadays.

Community or reserve life in the future

(3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

People today don't follow the old ways like hunting and trapping. Maybe because they don't have anyone teaching them anymore. I think they're just not interested in that kind of life. If they don't have skills, they will have a hard time in the future. I see that happening already. I see these young people that walk around with little or zero skills in the community and it doesn't help when there are no jobs available for them. There are only a few that have jobs. The biggest

obstacle that they are facing today is alcohol and drugs. It affects their whole lives in a negative way that even when jobs become available sometimes, they won't or can't work because of these things that they get into. That's what I see happening to some of our young people. I can't say what the future holds for them.

What do you feel should be done to preserve the language so the children won't lose it?

They have a Native language program at the school but they just don't want to learn it. I'm saying this because that's how my younger children were too. They didn't want to learn it even though they had a teacher who was teaching them the language. They only know some basic words but that's not even enough for them to be fluent. Only some of them can speak it. When I was growing up I learned the language from my parents so that was my first language. I think there should be more effort trying to encourage the children and even the young adults who don't speak it by having like a regular school with just Native language teaching there. I don't know if that would make a difference.

They are more comfortable using the English language than their own language today. I hear in other communities like Lansdowne House that the kids there are still fluent in their language. I think it's the parents that help their kids by speaking to them in the language all the time. That really does help a child when they learn it at home.

I hardly ever hear a kid using the language in this community. I can't even communicate with my own kids because they would rather speak English. I can't even tell them about anything like to advise them about things in life.

There was a lady (mental health worker) who visits our community every now and then. She comes here to help the local people on how to deal with the issues that they may have. There are only a few people that go see her when she's here. I was hoping to go see her too and tell her some of the concerns I have in regards to the young people who have problems in their lives. Just so that she's aware of what they go through and hopefully she'll understand more of the issues they need to address in order for them to start improving their lives



Marten Falls Health Centre

These young people need to learn about the positive ways to deal with their relationships; that there is a better way to work on the issues that affect their relationships and family. They need to learn about good parenting skills so kids can grow up to be strong in every way. Couples need to stop the violence in their homes so their kids won't continue to see and hear all the negative things that come from there.

Audrey Achneepineeskum

(recorded March 4, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Audrey Nancy Achneepineeskum

Date of Birth: April 6, 1975

Place of Birth: Sioux Lookout

Present Address: Ogoki Post

Education: Grade 10

Interests/Hobbies: Computers, Volleyball,
and Sports

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I was born in Sioux Lookout. I have four brothers. I can't really remember the past because it was so awful mostly because there was a lot of drinking. The reserve was mostly just bush around here. I remember there was a pool hall here, movie nights, and there used to be dances. People used to do stuff like going fishing and camping and that's what my family and I did. We would go to school all year. Then [we would] take off from here after school is done and stay in the bush.

I mostly just sat around; my brothers and my mom did most of the things. I used to watch my dad hunt. [I used to] paddle around with my dad. I never really hung around the camp as I was with my dad all the time. He taught me how to use a gun maybe when I was about ten but it hurt me so I don't like guns anymore. I've never touched a gun ever since. I'm kind of scared of guns.

There's a lot of hostility here in the reserve . . . It's always been like that ever since I was small and it is still like that. To this day it is still like that. There are always people fighting, drinking, being drunk or if somebody does something wrong when they are drinking then it still carries on when they are sober. They

don't go to that person and apologize. It just makes things worse and kids are affected by that.

I know how to speak Ojibway but I just don't use it. I talk around my cousins my age, but I don't talk to older people or elders. I don't talk to them like that.

When you were living in the bush, how far was it from here?

I don't know how far that is. We used to go all over the place to Napkin Lake and Stone Basket. It took two days to get there and we would camp once.

Is that where your traditional land or trap line was?

It's a trap line my dad owns. I know my grandpa owns one, two of my grandpas own one each I think. I know my mom's dad goes camping somewhere. I never asked questions like this when I was growing up. I mostly kept to myself when I was growing up. That's why I don't really know how to answer these questions because I mostly hung around in the bush. I used to walk around and pretend I was somewhere else, that's how much I wanted to get away from here.

Did your parents teach you anything about how to prepare animals like skinning them?

Yes, but I just didn't like it. The only thing I do is pluck geese.

Did you go to school?

I finished Grade 8 here in the reserve. Then I went to high school for three years. My first two years were in North Bay and one year in Sault Ste. Marie. Then I came home. I didn't graduate from high school. The reason was that I was too lazy I guess. I was too messed up from things that went on in my life when I was growing up. I don't know what to say about this question.



Henry Coaster Memorial School

What about your siblings?

My older brother Steven mostly lived with our grandparents. He was always in the bush with them. My second oldest brother went through whatever I went through, I guess, because we were always together. He was the one mostly looking after me. He was always there when I needed him. He never left me.

Did you have good relationships with your siblings?

Yes, I have two that are my half brothers and the two oldest ones are my full brothers. I have a really good relationship with my oldest brother. The second oldest one I guess we just hung out until I was about 21 when we became a real family. I have two other half brothers.

When I was about 19, I was hired at the Band Office to work as a receptionist. I was really good at computers and typewriting. I worked there for about a year and half. Then I left that job and went to school for a couple of years. I quit working there in 1998 because the day care shut down and I had a son when I was 18. What else did I do? I was also a guard for the police and I was a janitor at the school for a year.

When I was a teenager, there used to be an arcade here. I used to run the arcade with six other people. We ran it for a year and half until my cousin left money in

one of those cash boxes. [Once] this other girl came into the arcade with me after hours. I was getting something I left there and she found it, stole it, and took all that money. I quit after because I felt like it was my fault. I didn't want to work there anymore. It closed soon (about half a year later) after I quit.

I'm not much of a cultural person like sewing and crafts. I don't do that stuff or plucking and filleting fish. I tried anyway but I tended to take all the meat off.

Did you see your mother do that kind of stuff?

Yes, I just don't like the smell of fish or the smell of pulling out guts. I don't like killing stuff. I don't know why I'm like that. I used to block my ears when my dad would shoot a gun. I never used to look at dead animals. I can look at them now; I got over it. I still don't fillet fish. I don't skin rabbits. I do know how to skin it but I just don't do it. I don't think I ever touched a partridge or a rabbit. I touched fish and geese. I know how to skin a moose because my parents were always moose hunting. They showed me how to do that. I used to cut up moose meat. I think I know how. That's all I can talk about that question there.

Did you ever go to any pow wows or anything?

I go to pow wows all the time. I dance once in awhile but I don't have an outfit. I know all the things like the dos and do nots of pow wows. I went to a sweat lodge once when I was about 14 or 15 but I never went back there again. I was scared actually.

Do they have pow wows here?

They had their 10th annual pow wow this year, this past year. We are supposed to have it every year in August. Most people who attend are from outside communities around this area. There are like four or five groups coming here plus we have their own group here. They are called Sturgeon Head Point. That's the [name of this] young group of singers. We have dancers here too.

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

My life today is really busy. I have three kids: Jeremy is nine, Justin is five, and Bowen is two. Two of them are in school. I get odd jobs like when my two

younger kids are with their dad. I go work at the school or at the Band Office. When people are gone out, I substitute for them.

Did you ever operate heavy equipment?

No, but I tried one of those big trucks. I drove [one] of those once, it's scary. I was just testing. I never worked with any of the heavy equipment stuff or carpentry. I mostly do things with young kids. I'm always getting into accidents with vehicles.

Right now in the reserve here, there is nothing to do. But every night we go to the school gym to play volleyball and that's the only social thing that goes on around here. There used to be an arcade here but there are always break-ins. It's the younger kids ranging from about 10 to 14 that always break in there. Right now those things like the games and the jukebox are all smashed up. There's no day care here so a lot of people don't work around here. I don't work around here because of that. If there was one I'd probably work in it.

Do you know if other people your age or generation know their language?

Most of them do. I know all my cousins, most of my cousins are on my dad's side, can speak it. All my brothers can speak it. I know a couple of families [where] all of their kids can speak it, like the Coasters. I would guess about half the community speaks it and other half can't. My kids don't speak it at all. I know other kids around here and they don't speak their language. Maybe those over the age of 20 and up know how to speak the language. Like we were counting numbers and this one guy said *neeshin*, and this one girl, she's 18, said what is that, one? or something like that. They don't know their numbers.

How did you manage to know the language, did your parents talk to you in the language all the time?

Yes, and there were always my grandparents, aunts and uncles in the bush with us and I used to listen to them talking. They always used the language. My mom used to be a home maker for the elderly so I always hung around with her. I would listen to them talking. We had the Native language every day in school. My mom used to give me that the red book, the hymn book, and I would read off that. She helped me like reading as story to me. She used to write all kinds of words on a piece of paper. I would read it, like my name is Audrey. I would have

to read that in Ojibway and [read] things like how are you, basic stuff. But I picked it up most of it on my own like the bigger words I guess. My cousin Patty and I used to hang around our grandparents. That's all they would talk to us in Ojibway. She never used English around us. I would have to guess what she said.

Did you ever hear any elders talking about that time when they had a treaty signed here back in 1905?

No, they talk too fast. I don't even understand my mon because she talks too fast.

Community or reserve life in the future

(3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

In this community, I see changes now like I see more things. I know there is going to be an arena here. The kids will probably start getting into sports like curling, hockey, broomball, and what you can do on artificial ice.

There are supposed to be houses going up again this summer. There are about four or five houses that will be built.

Are there any places where they are going to put up houses for the population? Do they have lots here where they are going to put them?

I don't know if there are any lots left on the reserve here. I don't know about that. I don't know where they could build those. There's hardly any room down here. You can't make houses past the creek anyway.

Do you think that the language is going downhill?

My generation that is having kids, I don't hear them speak in Ojibway at all. They don't even know [how to speak it]. I know my kids don't know how to speak it. My nephews and nieces, like my brother's kids, they don't know how to speak it. Most of the kids around here all they know how to do is curse, those kinds of words, yet they can't pick up their language.

I try to teach my kids. My older son is picking up on it. He pays attention to his Native language teacher. But he won't speak it in front of the other kids because they like to tease. They tell him it sounds funny.

What do you think can be done to preserve the language?

It's all right what they do now like they have it in the school but I wish they could have it at night, like evening courses for kids because that's what they did for us. A couple of years ago, they had a program like that for adults in the evenings to learn the Native language. I wish they could have that for kids. I know a lot of people whom I grew up with that really want to know. Even people I meet outside the community want to learn to speak Ojibway.

Do you know what the children around here do to keep busy or occupied?

Every Tuesday and Thursday they have an after school program at the school to play sports. Tuesdays are for the girls and Thursdays are for the boys but they only have it once a week. Then every evening we go to the gym and play volleyball and the kids come there. Some adults don't like the kids coming there because they run around and disrupt the games. Most of the kids just go to other kids' houses and play video games like Play Station or just watch TV. That's all they do: watch TV and play video games. I don't see kids going anywhere like sliding. We used to always go sliding, make bonfires, and go picnicking. They don't do that anymore. Most of the kids around just fight each other. There is a group of kids that hang around and pick on other kids. They just mostly walk around the community and cause trouble. Some kids break into other people's houses and steal stuff or damage their property.

What would you like to see being built here?

I'd like to see one thing for the kids, who are going to school from maybe one to four years old, like a Head Start program. Maybe have somebody there teach them to get ready for school. Or maybe even a drop-in centre. We can't use the community centre because there are people who work downstairs. They don't want kids running around inside there. [Maybe] just a place to play cards and watch movies there or have movie day or night. Not an arcade though, I think they have enough of that in their homes.

Do you think a hotel would be good for this community?

I don't know but maybe a Northern Store would be good to have here.

Do you find that quite a few people come in here from the outside?

Yes, they are always looking for places to live or places to stay. The only place

they have right now is where you guys are in the health centre and in people's houses, I guess, if they are willing to take people in. We could probably use a laundromat here.

I guess the communities are getting into forestry. How do you think it will affect the community? Do you think it will get better as it progresses along?

I don't know about forestry, maybe, I know there is a lot of conflict in that. I wish they would make a road here.

Do you think the youth of your generation are being listened to by the elders?

No, they think we are just drinking and doing drugs. I walked into my grandfather's apartment and he called somebody on me and said there is a crazy girl sitting here. He didn't even recognize me because I dyed my hair. They treat us as if we have no voice. It doesn't matter what we think. They just want to be stuck in the old ways. That's what it seems like. It even makes me feel so little.

We don't have a youth council in the community. There used to be a youth council worker and it was only for five months. He used to work with the NAN youth council, but it was just part-time work.

When they have chiefs meetings would it be a good idea if they have an elder and a youth going with the chief to these kind of meetings?

Yes, I know the elder can't go to meetings because it's too cold or it's raining and people don't provide transportation for them. We used to do that but that's when a secretary used to tag along with them, just to go listen about what's being talked about. It seems like they just decide for everybody. The chief and council don't tell their people what's going on until they have a general meeting and that they already decided everything among themselves.



Marten Falls First Nation Band Office

Have you heard if there's any exploration from mining companies or other companies around this area?

Yes, there's DeBeers. They are mining just north of here. I think they are still there. Some people from here work there. They make good money. I know my cousin works there right now with them diamond drilling.

They got something going on in Nakina. Is anybody from the community working over there?

I don't think the ones who live on the reserve work there, just the ones who live off reserve from Marten Falls. They work over there. I know there were some people who used to go there to work when forestry went up. But ever since that accident when one guy died, I don't think there is hardly anybody there. I don't know what goes on because they don't tell anybody.

Do you think that when the elders pass on that a large piece of history is gone with them without being recorded?

Yes, I suppose so. I always ask my dad questions like what his dad used to do.

Do you like eating wild meat?

Yes, I like moose meat and kidneys and that nose part. My friend got me into eating moose nose and moose tongue. I like fish, any kind of fish, and partridge

but I don't really care for beaver though. I just don't like the way it smells. That's mostly what I eat, just that. I tried deer once but I didn't like it. It tastes too spongy. My oldest and youngest like eating wild meat but the middle one doesn't like eating meat. He's too much of a *wemitigooshi*. His dad is white but he's half Native though. He acts like a little white kid, like he doesn't like getting dirty and he doesn't like touching food that doesn't look brown or thinks it's burned.

Do you feel different when you eat wild meat compared to the stuff you get from the store?

Yes, if I eat store bought food I get hungry easily, but when I eat wild meat I only eat once a day or in the morning and evening. I don't feel hungry in between. It makes me feel that I have more energy.

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Neskantaga First Nation

P.O. Box 105
Lansdowne House, ON
P0T 1Z0



The Neskantaga First Nation is located on the south shore of Attawapiskat Lake.

Although the Neskantaga First Nation is found within the area described by Treaty No. 9, the commissioners mistakenly designated the people of Lansdowne House as belonging to the Fort Hope band. The community of Lansdowne House was formed in the 1960s. This site has always been the traditional settlement area of the Lansdowne House people. The Neskantaga Indian Reserve, approximately 831 hectares (3.2 square miles) in size, is located approximately 5 kilometres southwest of Lansdowne House.

Population: 368 registered band members with 272 people living on-reserve (June, 2006)

Languages: Ojibway and English

Catherine Ostamus

(recorded March 2, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Catherine Kathleen Ostamus
 Date of Birth: July 18, 1917
 Place of Birth: Fort Hope
 Present Address: Lansdowne House
 Former Name: Moonias
 Name of Spouse: Charles Ostamus
 Number of Children: 6
 Grandchildren: 7
 Great-grandchildre: 7
 Number of Years Married: 68
 Education: 2 years Macintosh Residential School (Catholic school)
 Interests/Hobbies: Sewing

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I wasn't always in the community during my younger years. Later there was talk about the new community that was going to be established not too far from the old one. They went around the community find out who agreed with the plan. I remember signing my name on there too. They wanted to establish a new community from where we were. I was informed way before that about the move. I've always lived in this area since I was a child, except that one time I was sent to a residential school. I must have been around seven years old. Other than that, I've never been away from this community. The only time I get to leave my community is if I go visiting. I don't leave my home for too long. I don't mind living in this house all by myself. Going back to the question about the move, I had signed my name to show my support about the move to a new place. I used to watch my son along with the other men going around the bush marking the trees by cutting them where that new community was going to be started. What they did was go around the bush and place the markers where the houses were going to be built. My son, who I'm talking about, drowned a few years back.

At that time when we still lived in the old reserve, I lived in this old run down house with no electricity. It was just an old frame of a house. We didn't have electricity yet. All I used for light were oil lamps. [I had] just a wood stove. The house where I now live was where one of my grandsons committed suicide, at least that's what they said happened to him. But I'm not so sure about that. They found him on his bed lying there. My daughter was living with me. There were some people who came and told me the house

where they found my grandchild should be torched. So I told them that if you do that then you are showing your disrespect towards my grandson about his death. It's as if you don't care what happened to him and this is not right. I told them no matter what happened to any person that we should just accept what happens. So they finally just left me alone but the rest of my family couldn't stay in that house. I told them I wasn't moving out of here. I'll stay here as long as I can and to this day I'm still here. I can't remember what year it was when my grandchild passed on. This house that I'm in is getting run down. It's an old house. I was never given a new house before and I still don't have a new house. I never bother asking for one. I'm just happy that the leaders in this community are trying their best to provide me with the basic things that I need. So that's why I never say anything. I'm content living in this house. I don't mind being here because it was my decision to keep living here. I just don't feel the need to have a new house. I just tell myself I don't think it's a big deal to get a new house now that I'm getting on with my age. I just hope that this is where I'll grow old until the day I die!



Neskantaga

We used plants for medicinal purposes. I hardly ever used medicine when I was young. If I did get sick, I would just pick whatever I needed from the bush to cure myself. I've used all kinds of plants for this purpose. I used to know what kind of plant to use for medicine but now I don't remember the name of plants I used for medicine. There are all kinds of stuff out there that we depended on: things like cedar. That was our main medicine back then. We used other plants, a variety of roots, and different kinds of

trees. We dug the roots from the trees and we would boil that. That's what we did a long time ago. Unfortunately I don't remember what we used back then, but we used just about anything that you see around here. The young people today don't really believe that's what we used. They question it if it actually works. They think that it won't help them if they try it even though I've been telling them about what's been used before. It's better for us, what the old people used in the past. I like using the cones from the trees because I know they help you if you should have a bad cold accompanied with a cough. I pick them and boil them in water and I still do that in this day and age. Today I still don't use these modern medicines as much, only once in a while when the doctor prescribes it to me. That's the only time I take them. If somebody accidentally cut their hand, they would just go to a place where these bulrushes grow along the ditches or where you can find these plants growing. That's what they picked to use as a bandage to stop the bleeding. That plant has medicinal properties. We still see these plants growing anywhere and nobody ever bothers with them or they just don't know what it could be used for. But I tell these young people what it's used for. We didn't have medicines from the white man back when I was young.

We didn't stay in the community very much in those days. We lived quite a way from here not too far from the rapids. Even while we were there, we would just go to a place where we knew what kinds of plants grew that we needed for medicine. We would just dig up the roots and boil them. If somebody got hurt from getting hit with an object, a birch tree was used. I would go and get that and use it as a dressing to the wound when someone got hurt. We used all kinds of things from the plants for medicine.

When we trapped the animals we used the fur for clothing and sold the pelts. We trapped any kind of fur bearing animal like marten, otter, and just about anything that you might see on the fur coats. Even the squirrel was regarded as an important item for making clothing. The other animal was the wolf. This is what they used for making clothes and hats. [It was the] same with beaver. They made all kinds of things from its fur.

I was never much into sewing things from these animal furs. I preferred to go out and trap them. I never even made a coat once. I saw other people make stuff from all kinds of animals. But for myself I was just never interested in sewing so I never made anything. I did all kinds of other work though. I was just a young child when I was sent to residential school. My younger brother Norman was even younger when we left for

school. I think we were there for about three years. I don't know if he will be talking about that.

As far as I can remember ever since we all moved from the old community years ago, things are so much different now than it was before we came to the new community. I think a lot of things that happened seemed to have slowed down somewhat. There are still people here that just don't want to make a difference for themselves or their community. I know there are some people who kind of changed their ways because I think they began to realize it only make things worse for them. That's what I think anyway. But years ago, you couldn't even sleep in your own house, that's how bad it was. The only place to go and feel safe was to go and sleep in the bush and that was all due to drinking. Today it is very different compared to what it was before and that's only because these younger people seem to be more responsible for themselves. Sometimes when I go outside after dark, it is very quiet. I hardly ever hear any kind of commotion around the reserve and I always have a good nights sleep. It wasn't anywhere near like this before when these people used to drink excessively. Most of them have died as a result of drinking. I started living in the old community before these things started happening and my husband was still alive then. He died quite a long time ago. I can't remember what year it was when he died. I don't know if anybody around here knows how long ago that was.

The lives of people would continue to improve if they don't give up what they had already accomplished for themselves. Surely more good things are to come their way. The children would also grow up to be healthy if they are well-taken care of by their parents throughout their childhood. I'll talk about myself as an example. I'm an elder and I've been here on this earth for a good many years. I don't think I would have been here where I am today if I didn't live my life accordingly. I always tell my grandkids about this too. I tell them if you want to have a long life this is what you have to follow too. I warn them that if they choose to live their lives in a [certain] way that can only lead them to a destructive path. They need to look after themselves and nobody else can do that for them. Sometimes they just respond by saying, how can you just sit around there when there's stuff to do. But I just tell them this is the way I like it. I don't need to go and start doing things that will only create more problems. I tell them stories about how it was back then, how it wasn't always like this in the community, and that we had many problems. So I believe most of these people have changed their ways and I think they realized what they were doing to their lives. If they continue to hold on to these

changes then I'm confident that it will most likely get better in the future.

During the summer months we try to go out on the land as much as we can. We go quite a way on the boat. I really enjoy the outings in the summer. There are still a few people that do this, leaving the community just to be out there. But there are others who won't do this, [it is] just the ones that are not used to that kind of living out on land.

We need more Native teachers in our school who are qualified to do this in order to help and maintain the language for these children. They should start teaching the kids who are just starting out with just the Native language. There are some children that can pick up the language and continue to use [it]. A lot of them that are around here can only speak English. It's hard to communicate with them but I can only talk to them a little bit because I know some English. It really bothers me to see this happening with our kids. It seems like they don't want to use what was given to them. They are refusing to honor their inheritance by using a different language other than their language. I'm sure the non-Aboriginals are aware of this too. The Creator gave us a language and we are just throwing it away. This is not right. I have a Bible that was translated into the language I speak and it tells us there when God created everything. He gave each and everyone from different backgrounds and what kind of language they would use. We were also given our language as Anishinawbe people. He didn't create us to try and be like the others. We don't really understand what's being talked about. Sometimes it doesn't make sense to those who are not bilingual. It even makes it hard on those that don't speak and understand English at all. When someone tries to talk to them it only confuses them more. The person that doesn't understand English can't make sense of what the other is talking about. They probably just wonder what that other person said to her and they don't have a clue if it was important or [they are] just being made fun of. This is not right at all. Even people that speak the language tend to forget how to communicate properly because the language that's being used today is getting jumbled, especially with the children and young adults. When I talk to kids it's as if they don't even hear me. They probably just wonder what kind of noise I'm making or they might think I'm trying to pick on them. Some of them don't even understand a word of the Native language. That's why they don't pay attention to anybody when they are spoken to. I don't even know if they are being taught how to read and write in syllabics at the school. I never go there to check but I sure hope that they are being taught the language.

I was about seven years old when I started to hunt. I was big enough to do my part to bring home food for the family. I began by catching fish and snaring rabbits. I used to walk many miles looking for food. I learned at an early age that I had to do these things on my own. My mother died when I was very small. It didn't take me long to know how to survive off the land. I gradually went further away from our camp by myself. I never got any kind of assistance from anybody. Not once do I remember anyone helping me; it was up to me to do things. Sometimes I didn't have anything to take with me on my long journey. I would only take my little pot and if I got lucky I would be given tea and a handful of flour. This was supposed to last me all day while I'm walking around hunting for food. One of the teachings I learned when I was still small was to start doing these things as soon as I'm able to. Sure enough I began to venture out all by myself so that I can help my family by bringing home food to them. I didn't really have anybody to teach me about other things like the way a mother would since my mother died. I pretty much had to learn on my own but I learned a lot from my father though. Sometimes there would be other girls my age who would join me on my journeys. We used to go very far hunting together. Those girls that I used to hang around with were my cousins.

I started trapping animals so that I could make some money from there too. It didn't take me long to get the basic necessities from the money I earned by selling the pelts. I became independent not too long after. I became quite skilled as a hunter and trapper. I had to, as there was nobody looking after me.

It's very important to teach a child when they are still small about the ways of hunting. I'm still alive today because I listened and obeyed my father's teachings while he was taking care of me. He warned me about things that could have a negative impact on me. If I did those things that's what I choose to do. I never picked up any of the things that could harm me in any way. That's why I'm still around today because I believe when you follow the teachings it helps you along the way as you go about your life. I don't think I would still be here if I had not held on to the teachings. To this day I still believe life has been good to me. But lately I've been feeling some changes taking place in my life, I'm starting to feel old age creeping up on me. I still do my daily walks on nice days just to get some exercise. I still do a little bit of work outside but not as much as I used to. If nobody comes around to help me around the house, I do it myself. I do have people dropping off firewood for me. So I can't say that nobody ever helps me. My son came to visit me recently from Fort Hope and while he was here he went to cut firewood for me. So I have a good supply to last me awhile. He went back home after.

Now going back to my story about long ago. I'm amazed today when I think about how far I used to walk hunting and trapping but that was the way of life back then. There was no assistance from the government at that time yet, so we were very independent from these things. If we didn't catch anything, then we would just get hungry until we went out again. But we didn't always get anything. That's how it was. I know this for a fact because I was there too. I just didn't hear about it. There were times when it was very challenging but somehow everyone got by. I never went to places like a town and I never got to see what it looked like in those days.

During the summer months we did different things to sustain ourselves. So what my father did was fashion a wooden fish trap on the river. I would watch him as he was working on it.

We would go there to check the trap and gather the fish that were trapped there. I stayed with my father for a long time. It seems that way when I think about it. Today I always try to remind my grandkids about what my father taught me. I do that to pass on those teachings to them, especially about respecting the elders by listening to them. I also tell them to listen to their parents. I tell them this is why I'm still around today because I followed the teachings from my elders. I was always careful about the things that might influence me in a bad way. Because I was already warned about them before, I knew better not to do those things. I was never tempted to get into them. I knew that if I wanted my life to be the way I was taught then that's what I decided to do for myself. I took care of myself by learning the skills of how to live independently so that I can grow into a healthy person. Since I only had one parent who wasn't always around I had to learn quickly that I couldn't depend on any other adults.

If there were other people who were nearby, they kept an eye on any child that was there. So if an adult saw me do something they thought wasn't right they didn't hesitate to correct me. I would listen to them because I knew they did that to show they cared about what happened to me. I also learned by watching others make things that would stay with me for life. So I started making things like snowshoes, toboggans, and everything else that a man usually does. I learned to do them too. It really paid off in the long run because I took the time to learn stuff from others.

So when I needed something or if I didn't have what I needed I would just go ahead and make it myself. I didn't run around looking for someone to do these things for me. It

really goes a long way once you know how to do things yourself. If you do things in a right way that really makes a big difference too.

I never really had to struggle with anything as I went about doing things to stay alive. I hardly ever sat around doing nothing. I just continued to do the required daily tasks like chopping wood before night falls so that I can use it the following day. I did everything that needed doing.

Today I don't have to work as much as I used to but I can still do a bit of work outside the house. I find that I get bored just sitting around. I don't really get to go anywhere very much. Not like some people I see here. They are always going somewhere. I only go somewhere when I have to.

I have some more things to talk about. When I was still under my father's care, he brought a lady home that would be his next wife. It was during that summer that he decided we should make a fish trap on the river to catch the sturgeon. So my father said that we would stay at our camp all summer and not bother going back to the community. He expected everyone to help when he made the fish trap. My brother Norman was still with us too. He wasn't on his own just yet. My father took care of the two of us after my mother died. So along with our new stepmother we all left our camp to go where the river is. Once we got there, we walked around to check it out. It was during the time when the water was low. My father found a spot where he thought it would be a good place to make it (the fish trap). The river was a huge one! He told my brother and me to start cutting the small trees down to use as poles. My brother was already capable of doing things by helping out. My father then told us to watch him as he worked on the fish trap. He started by putting up the poles across the river where it wasn't too deep. We took the poles down to the river as he was putting them up. We would watch him as he continued to drive the poles under the river bed. We also went into the bushes to dig up the roots from the trees that he used to tie the poles together. Then he tied the other poles together like a raft and dragged them to where he had the poles in the river. Then he stands them upright like a fence so that they go all the way down to the bottom and act like a dam. After he got done with that he then made a plank to stand on and watch the sturgeon go into the trap. He would spear them when they got close enough. He had a metal spearhead that he used to kill them.

That's where we spent our summer. We didn't need to use the fish net. Sometimes we went with him to the trap to see the sturgeon make their way towards the trap. They looked pretty neat as we watched them go by. We would gather the birch bark and roll it up to use it as a candle. He found ways to make things just by getting things from the bush. Even if we didn't have a fish net, we used the fish trap instead. I tell my grandkids about this too. They would never get hungry while they are out there if they knew how to make things to catch something to eat. Then they won't need to run to the store if they got hungry.

Going back to my story, my father would stand there killing fish. Sometimes he would kill about 15 in one night. Then he would throw them in the canoe. That's what we lived on all that summer. We never got hungry. When I talk to my grandkids about this sometimes I would ask them if they could take me there so they could watch me make the fish trap. But they're not interested in what I tell them. That was a part of my life as I was growing up. I became a skilled hunter and trapper. The only animal I never got to kill was the moose. We all had to work for survival because we didn't have assistance like we do today. There was no such thing as a government handout in those days. If I didn't go hunting then I would have nothing to eat. Sometimes it was hard to find animals while we were hunting. I try to make the young people understand about the way it was before their time. I ask them what's going to happen to you when one day the government stops helping us out and you don't have the skills to survive. At least you wouldn't starve if you knew how to hunt.

I was 19 years old when my father told me it was time for me to get married. I was no longer under his care after I started living with the man I later married. I went away with him. We stayed all by ourselves in one place for about a year. He already had one child from his first marriage and I took that child as if he were my own. My father had already told me to accept his child and that I should treat him like my own child. So about a year later we moved to another spot. We weren't married yet but we eventually traveled to Fort Hope. That's where we went to see the priest to marry us the following summer. That's where people went to get married. There were no houses in Lansdowne

House at that time. There was just one cabin. The trip to Fort Hope was very difficult with lakes and portages to go through.

One day the store was built in our community but that was like many years later.



Leo's Confectionery

My husband was very good to me while I was with him. He was quite older than I. He was already an experienced hunter and trapper. He was well established in his life. We had a good relationship and because I was already experienced in being independent, it worked out really good for both of us. I never had to go without anything over the years I was with him. He was a good moose hunter. That's what we ate all the time. That's how good he was at killing moose. I hardly ever ate fish after that. I don't remember how many years I was with him but we were together for a long time. I think he was around 60 years old when he died. He was a heavy smoker and that's what killed him. He might have been around for many years if he wasn't smoking. As for myself, I never picked up that habit. I just never bothered with it. The only thing that I really like is drinking tea but to use other things like substances I just stayed away from them. I knew those things would only cause more grief in my life. So I can say that by choosing to live a clean life, I was blessed with many good things throughout my life.

I never had to go through so many hardships and to this day it's still that way. I have people helping me out with things I can no longer do. So I don't have to worry about doing them myself. My daughter lives close by and she checks up on me every other day. I also have the home support workers come to my house for cleaning. But I know they can't always do their jobs because of lack of funding. There is never enough for them to be able to continue with that kind of support that's really needed in this community.

Norman Moonias

(recorded March 1, 2004)



Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I learned to do things when I was still very small. I was already learning from watching others working to survive. I was brought up in a family that mainly depended off the land every single day. I remember even though there was a store in the community, there was hardly anything. It was the Hudson's Bay Company that came to set up the trading post, but it wasn't like a regular store that we have today. There wasn't very much in there at that time. The only things in the store were the basic necessities that were important like a fish net. That was probably the most vital thing to have in those days because that's all we needed to help us survive . . . Most of the time they would make the net themselves. I used to watch them make their nets. I started helping out with that as soon as I was able to. Everyone was always working on the nets. The parents would have all their children sitting together close by so that they can watch what they are doing. That's how they learned by watching and helping. I always watched whatever they were doing. People had next to nothing most of the time. Others had harder times than most. It's almost like the way it is today. Not everyone has the privilege of having a lot of things due to a lack of jobs or if they are disabled or if the children's parents are too sick to look after them. During that period of time, I was still too young to do what the adults were capable of.

Biographic Information

Name: Norman Moonias (March 1, 2004)

Date of Birth: January 22, 1922

Place of Birth: Attawapiskat River (90 miles from Lansdowne House)

Present Address: Lansdowne House

Name of Spouse: Suzanne Simon

Number of Children: 10

Grandchildren: 32

Great-grandchildren: 10

Number of Years Married: 52

Education: 2 years at Macintosh

Residential School (Catholic school along the railroad)

Interests/Hobbies: Hunting

But my father began teaching me one early fall how to start doing things. I remember when he allowed me to start helping out when they made a tipi. That was where we were going to spend the whole winter. All we used was the moss to cover the tipi all around and all the way up on the roof. That's where we were all winter. We also started getting firewood ready while it was still warm. Those are the things my father expected me to take care of as I got bigger. But I wasn't even close to being independent just yet. Times were very hard but during the summer months it wasn't too difficult finding food because we always had a fish net to use. We fished every day during the summer. That's all we would live on by catching fish. That was our main source of food. Sometimes we had different kinds of food if someone happened to kill a moose. That's what I remember. We also had a variety of ducks and rabbits to help us through. During winter it wasn't as easy as it was during summer. I was still not quite able to help out as much at that time. Besides I was the only boy in the family. I had several sisters that were older than me but I couldn't keep up with them. I remember clearly how hard it was during winter especially before I could do any kind of work. I didn't have the skills to trap and hunt yet. Some people were able to buy stuff from the store if they had pelts to sell. I saw them bringing their catch home like mink, otter, and fox. That's how they began to buy things by selling their pelts but that wasn't enough to actually get a whole lot from the store. That's what it was like with us. My father continued to teach me about ways to keep us going. Sometimes during summer he would be making a fish trap if we didn't have a net. He used to make a fish trap on the river to catch the sturgeon. He would do this when the water on the river was low. I helped him with that too as he was working on the trap. I would cut the small trees down that he needed for his trap. It didn't take me long to know how to do that too. But before he finished it, he would still go there to wait for the sturgeon to go by. All he had was a spear that he used to kill them as they were blocked from the partial dam that he created. He made the dam across the river. He would also make a plank close to the water, stand on it, and wait for the fish to go by. Sometimes he would stand there all night waiting. All he used for a light was birch bark that he rolled up. That's how he was able to see them in the water. As soon as he saw the fish go by, he would throw his spear at it and kill it. Some nights he killed lots, as many as 20. The river is about 30 miles away from this community east of here. That's where he had that fish trap. A couple of summers later we would go back there to make another fish trap. This time he would make it in such a way that he would

catch any kind of fish not just the sturgeon. He would get to work on it. This is the big river I'm talking about. It's not just a little creek where he made the dam. The amazing thing was I never saw him use one single nail to hold the trap together. All he used were the roots from the trees that we dug up to tie the poles together. We used to gather lots of them. He worked very hard making that fish trap. After he finished, all we had to do was wait until the next morning to go and bring the fish home. We got all kinds of fish from there. Next thing he did was smoke them over the fire pit. They would get all dry and cooked. We know that during summer fish spoils in no time especially the sturgeon. After they were smoked he would tear the fish apart and make pemmican out of them. Some of them he just smoked to be eaten. That way they don't get spoiled and they keep for a long time. He used to put it away for later when we didn't have much to eat. He prepared any kind of fish and meat by smoking them, even moose. I saw him make pemmican out of that too. He did that by pounding the meat with a rock until it was all ground up. He stored it in the birch bark containers that he had made for that purpose. The other thing that he made was the fish oil. He used the skin to store the oil in there. He made as much as he could so that it would last us for a long time. He would skin the big fish and then make a bag out of it. He poured the fish oil in there. It kept for a long time. We never had any kinds of glass jars back then. So that's what he used to make containers. Sometimes he even used the rabbit skin for that. That's what we had over the winter when we didn't have anything else to eat. I got to see all those things like the way they used to prepare food. I just didn't hear about them. I was always there whatever they were working on. That's how I got to know how to do it too.

We stayed at this place every summer. It must be at least 28 miles from this community. The only time that we came to where the old community was when there was a treaty day. The Indian agent used to arrive there every summer to pay everyone their treaty money, four dollars for each person. The community where we used to stay is on an island. Nobody minded not having anything back then, not like the way it is today. We have all kinds of things, I didn't mind going without those things. The only thing that was most important in our lives was that we didn't run out of our main source of food, fish. That was all we needed. Even at that time there was no such thing as money as we know it today. Nobody ever had any money and there were no jobs either. Even though there

was a store but we never had money to buy things. There was no such thing as what you do today where we go there to buy things and charge it on our account. What they started doing as the treaty day got closer was to go ask if they could get stuff in advance and then they would pay it with their treaty money. They did that because they just couldn't wait to go to the store and get some tea at least. Sometimes when they really needed a new fish net, they would figure out how much each family gets at four dollars each so that it would be enough to pay their bill. I was never given my four dollars when I was still a child so I could buy something for myself. My father would rather use our money to buy important things that we needed, for example, a fish net or some canvas. These [things] didn't cost very much in those days. There were no tarps available yet, so the next most important item was canvas. It was made out of material. People used to think it was the finest thing they could have when they first came out especially the mosquito net. We never had anything to protect ourselves from the mosquitoes. The only thing we did was make a fire around where we were sleeping to keep the bugs away. There used these old canister type gas cans that were discarded. That's where we would stuff the wood and light it up so it'll get smoky and we could get some sleep. That was before we got a mosquito net. It was hard trying to sleep with a rabbit fur blanket over our face during summer when it's hot. That's how poor we were. But not too long after, we started hearing stories about the people that were living close to the highway. It was getting easier to access the things that were really needed. Some people started heading out over there but my family couldn't go, so we just stayed where we were. By that time I was getting to be a young man so I started doing things that I had learned as I was growing up. I knew I had to start doing things for myself and besides my father was getting weak from being sick especially during winter. I started hunting and trapping during fall. I would still travel around with my father during that time but as it got very cold he couldn't walk the distance so he just stayed home. I was about 18 years old that time. I heard it was getting easier for people who lived nearby the other communities. The price of fur around here wasn't very much. People said you could get more money for the pelts if you took them to Fort Hope. I started keeping whatever I trapped and waited until other people headed out there. I decided I should go too all by myself. I was able to provide the necessities for my family after that. People would just have their toboggans that they pulled along as they were walking to their destinations.



Northern Store

Soon after the supplies were brought to Lansdowne House by having people pull the toboggans loaded with supplies from Fort Hope. Sometimes there would be about ten men who came to drop them off. I think they used to have about 200 pounds of supplies on each toboggan that each man would bring in. There were many people living nearby in this area. Those were the ones that came to buy things when they knew supplies were brought in. They're the ones who made it a lot easier for them. But for us, we were quite [far] away from that area so we couldn't get anything because by the time we got there everything was gone. Often we went back home with nothing and that was quite hard on us.

Every fall before winter sets in we got ready to fix up our dwelling place. We just stayed in one place all winter long. That's what the other people did too. They would pick a place that they thought would be a good place to stay all winter: where the animals were abundant in that area and where there were lots of dead trees to use for firewood. There weren't too many places where you could find the animals because they were being killed off. They started getting really scarce. Even the rabbits that we caught by snaring them were disappearing. So we had to go further away to find them and that was by walking. Sometimes we ended up having to move to another spot to be closer to [places] where there were some animals. We didn't mind moving around in the middle of winter. It was very hard making a temporary dwelling by digging a hole in the deep snow

and using the evergreens all around it. That's where we stayed until it was time to move again. They made sure there was lots of firewood nearby. All we used for cutting wood was an axe. We didn't have a handsaw yet. Yet people didn't mind having an axe to use for cutting wood and they always had plenty of wood to last them for a while outside their place. It's not like today when I look around this community. Some people hardly have any firewood ready outside their house. It wasn't like that before. They always had piles of firewood and all they used was an axe. Everyone worked by doing things physically. That's why they were tough and strong back then. They hardly ever got sick except when they got into an accident. They lived for a long time. As time went on, some men were hired to carry loads of supplies on their backs. I noticed they started getting sick and weaker. Some of them even died as a result of carrying too much weight. That's what they said anyway. They had to travel a long way to bring in the supplies and of course what they had to travel through was very rough and treacherous especially going through the portages. The stuff they carried was very heavy. They also had to carry the canoes they were traveling with and that's how it took a toll on them soon after that.

Before all this started everyone was fine. They didn't have to push their physical strength to the limit as they were going about at their own pace. It didn't affect their physical well being.

As time went on, things that were scarce in terms of basic necessities were getting plentiful. I don't remember how long ago this was. The other thing introduced to the people was that the children started receiving the benefit from the government. I was already an adult then. Each child got six dollars every month. All the parents had to do was go to the store and purchase what was available. The store manager would calculate the amount and the limit of the things they had to buy. This benefit was meant for the parents to buy food for their children. There were still no jobs at that time. I was an adult already so I was ready and willing to take on anything to make money. One day I left with the other guy to travel by canoe to a place called Auden. People used to pass on their stories to each other about what was available in some places. I had heard that they were selling blueberries where we were going. People there picked berries and sold them at \$2.50 a basket. It was quite expensive in those days. I stayed there all summer. I got a job cutting cords of wood for the logging company. I

got paid \$2.50 per cord. Soon after I went back home along with the goods that I bought for my family, especially the stuff that we needed. Things didn't cost very much. A 24-ounce loaf of bread cost 11¢ and a 100-pound bag of flour cost \$3.00. Even though we didn't get much pay in those days, we were able to buy quite a bit of stuff with what little money you had. People started heading out where there were a variety of things available to buy. Then they would go back to their camp with goods like tea, matches, and other items. [They mostly bought] the things that were needed. That's where I first found these saw blades in the store. I was so happy when I bought them. I couldn't wait to get home and show it off. They didn't have the handles for them. It was just a blade by itself and what I did was fashion a wooden handle and attach the blade to it. Now it was much easier to get firewood when I used the saw.

. . . One summer people started commercial fishing for sturgeon. I joined in with the others. Life was getting much easier then. I fished commercially all summer but we didn't get very much at first. Over the next few summers, the person who was buying [fish] started paying good money for them. The plane used to fly from Nakina to pick up a load of sturgeon. He paid us five cents per pound of sturgeon and over the summers we were getting 25 cents per pound. Those were the exciting times because every time the plane arrived the pilot would also bring in a load of goods for us to buy. The owner of the company was called Austin Airways. They used to fly to our camp to pick up the fish. Then one summer they didn't buy sturgeon anymore. Later on we started commercial fishing again but instead of sturgeon we were selling other kinds of fish. It was a different company that was buying [fish] from us and just like the first time we didn't get much for the fish we sold.

One day a Catholic priest arrived in Lansdowne House. I was hired to work for him. I got paid three dollars a day. I worked there for many years. It doesn't seem too long ago though. I never got any other kind of job except commercial fishing and trapping after I was done working there. I trapped for many years. I always left to go to my trap line. I stayed there right up until Christmas. Then I would take the pelts to the store to sell them.

The next thing that started was a sawmill. People were hired to cut the trees to be made into lumber. Most of the trees except balsam were cut down around the community. They made all kinds of lumber for the new houses that were built for the local people. The priest was put in charge of overseeing all the work that was started. Soon lots of houses and even a school were being built on an island that was the main settlement. That's when the kids started going to school there. There are still lots of them around that went to school there. So it was the priest that started up all kinds of jobs around the community. We didn't have the local band authority yet. There were all kinds of things that were started in terms of gaining employment but they just never got off the ground.

I was about 20 years old the very first time I saw a plane arrive here. That's how the priest came in. He owned that plane. He flew from Long Lac to come here. It was a very small plane. People had to go down to the lake to pack the snow down for it to land. It wasn't equipped to land on any lake that was snow covered. It didn't have a cover on the cockpit so you could see their heads sticking out over the top. They were just using a blanket to cover themselves. They were strapped in to keep from falling out. It was almost like the way a ski-doo looks. That's what I remember the first time I saw a plane.

We didn't have very many beaver while I was growing up. [It is] not like the way it is today. They were very scarce around this area. I don't recall ever seeing them at our trap line during those years. I wasn't until I was almost grown up when I started seeing them. It became one of the most important animals to trap. We also used it for food. The only other animals that were common were mink, otter, and fox.

We ate animals like beaver and otter, and sometimes we ate mink. We didn't eat fox or marten. The fox became very popular for its fur. The price for it was really good but earlier any kind of pelt wasn't worth much. I think they said it was only about fifty cents for a mink or marten pelt. When I started trapping and selling the pelts, I used to get about ten to twelve dollars for a mink. After we came home with our catch we would clean the animals. Then [we would] stretch them on a piece of wood carved to fit the pelt and let it dry. Once all the pelts were dry, we would take them to the store and sell them. Money wasn't used in exchange for our pelts. We would just get some stuff that we wanted to buy. The

store manager would tell us how much our pelts were worth and that's how much stuff we got. If someone had lots of pelts and didn't go over their limit then the store keeper would just write how much credit they had in his book. They could go back the next time they needed something from the store. Otter and mink were the two animals that were most popular followed by marten, fisher, and lynx. We used to eat lynx too.

I never actually saw anybody getting sick from consuming animals. They knew just by looking at it if it was ok to eat it. If the fish looked skinny then they would gut it to check if it has fat or if it smells. They just threw it away when they knew it's not good for eating. Sometimes the rabbits would be like that too. If it looks very skinny they didn't touch it. Otherwise all these things that they used for food kept them strong and healthy. We didn't need to eat as much, maybe just a piece of fish or a rabbit leg. That's what I would have before heading out to hunt and trap. I won't get hungry all day even when I'm walking. I never got tired easily. I just kept on going all day long. There was never anything wrong with me. The things I eat today make my body feel so weak compared to what I used to eat long time ago. I don't feel satisfied. No matter how much I eat, I still feel hungry. A long time ago when we didn't even have tea. As long as we drank some fish broth or any other kind of broth that you boil your food in like rabbit, we were ok. That's all we needed to make us feel good all day. We hardly drank water either. Sometimes we would just melt the snow and drink a little bit of that. The most important thing to drink was fish broth. Nothing was ever fried. All we did was cook our food by boiling it. Nobody ever got sick from the way we prepared the food. Even the elders stayed healthy. Today I know lots of people who have heart problems. I think it has to do with eating greasy foods.

It is so much easier to kill animals today. They try to eat as much as they can right away and end up eating too much of it. But before then, people had to struggle to hunt for food. They didn't always find anything. Besides they didn't have all these things that we have today. They didn't use very much food either or eat very often. That's just the way they were. If they happened to kill something then they would cook and eat some of it right away. When I used to travel, sometimes I would see a partridge in the bush. I would get a stick and attach a wire to snare it. That's how I would get it. I went without food all day but now I had the partridge to take care of my hunger. Right after that I went to

a spot to start a fire so I can cook my bird and eat it. The food we ate was always fresh. We never had anything that was frozen for a long time. Anything that was killed the day before is what we ate first thing in the morning. We always had an early start in the morning to go hunting. We didn't always have anything to eat. As long as we had something the night before we were fine. We would just leave without having breakfast. Early in the morning we would head out to the lake and chop a hole in the ice to fish. That was one of the things we did. After we got enough fish, we would head home so everyone in the family could have breakfast. When I was a child my father didn't always come home with anything so we got hungry. My father wasn't a very healthy man. All we did was stay by the fire to keep ourselves warm. We had no one to help us out.

It was a very difficult time especially in the middle of winter. Even the animals weren't around when it's freezing cold like in January and February. All the animals stayed out of the cold. Even the rabbits would disappear. You don't even see their tracks anywhere. They don't go near where you set your snares. It's the same with the other animals. We mainly depended on ice fishing. There were times when they kind of disappeared too [in the areas] where there used to be lots of them. We pretty much had to go without food for days at a time. When it started to get warm again in early spring, we started having a better chance of finding food again.

I only heard the elders talking about the first treaty signing that happened before I was born. I guess that's when the government began to help the people with money. That's what he had promised when they first went around to these settlements where the Native people were living. It didn't happen right away though. I don't think they really kept their promise from all those years. I've seen so many people struggle to stay alive. Lately I've been hearing stories about the situation the Native people are in their communities down south. They are still having a hard time trying to exercise their treaty rights as they were promised. The young people today don't really understand what the treaty stands for. All they know now is what kind of jobs they could get so they can support themselves. I often wonder what's going to happen to them in the future when the government stops helping us with money, especially those that have been on welfare. I never talk to people about these things. I just keep my thoughts to myself. I never even so much as join in the discussions they usually

have in the community. It's not in me to become a politician but I just listen to them when they talk about these things.

Before this all came to be, Native people were content to be in their land. They had the ability to fend for themselves. I think they should have just been left alone the way they were meant to be. Just let them do what they were capable of doing. I hear about the Native people down south losing their land and everything all because of these new policies that are being imposed on them. I don't even understand why the government feels the need to place these laws on them. I feel it's not right what they are doing today. [They are] using these policies so we no longer have rights to fish or are only given limited access to our livelihood. I know one thing for sure, our people today can never go back to their old ways. I know for myself I can never do these, even if I did try to attempt [to do things] the way a white man does when he wants to start something for himself. Even if there were resources like minerals or diamonds underneath my house I wouldn't even begin to know how to start that kind of work. We still have to depend on the non-Native to come and show us how to get it going for ourselves because we know they are capable of doing anything. They even start their own mining companies anywhere. They always find ways to make money for themselves, even logging. Our people still have a chance to start something even if it's just a minor thing like a logging business, something that's not too complicated. They could even start their own business like carving to make snowshoes, sleds, or anything. These are simple enough to get them started. But I'm not so sure if they tried something major like a logging business.

I grew up where there were lots of trees and everything was still the way it was back then. We didn't need to cut them all down. There are only a few places in the bush where some trees were cut down. We can't have these people accusing us that we are responsible for clear cutting our forests. The only trees that we used were the dead ones for our firewood. We hardly ever touched the trees that were still green. So why can't we have that right to do what we want with our trees. They didn't try to cut everything down where they lived. They just kept it the way it was all around them. All we ever needed were the young trees that we used for making our dwellings and the boughs for bedding. There are other types of trees that we used for something else, like cedar. We used it for medicine. I always saw people use it as a dressing for wounds. If there was a

swelling on any part of the body, they would gather the cedar boughs and pound it until it's all ground up. Then they just applied it to the swelling to help it go down. It worked really good. There are other kinds of trees and plants that were used for medicine when we were living out there. They also dug up the roots for any kind of ailments. They knew what to use for whatever was wrong with them. I don't remember any of those things they used before because I don't see that anymore. But that's what I used at that time too. I knew where to find them especially the roots that grow under the ground. That's what I drank to help me feel better. The cedar was boiled in the water and we drank that too. This was before we started using tea from the store. That's all we had to drink. It also worked both ways. We used it as tea to drink and to keep us healthy. We had all kinds of things that we needed within our reach. We gathered birch bark to keep us dry. They sewed them together into a big square piece. I saw them using birch bark to make canoes. Then I started making them too but I don't do that anymore. I do make things by carving them. I have quite a few things that I've been carving over the years. I had little birch bark canoes I made but I sold them all recently. I still make them once in a while. I have other items that I carved like a dog team.



Rachel Bessie Sakance Memorial Health Centre

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

Today I'm just happy that I was given a house to live in. I think that was really generous of them to give me a nice comfortable house. I can't do too much anymore. I'm also on old age pension to help me get by.

Community or reserve life in the future

(3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

As far as my opinion on what the future holds for us, I think everything will go back to the way it was long time ago, especially when the government cuts off all the funding that comes from there. Our people will face a lot of problems when it happens. [Especially] those [people] who don't have jobs. I already see that happening. There are hardly any jobs available to begin with. People will struggle because they have no clue how to survive on the land. There are lots of young people who don't know any of the survival skills that we once had. We knew how to survive on our own. We got along without any outside help but the people today won't stand a chance to live a life that we had in the past. How are they going to make it? They have no jobs. Welfare will be no more. I can only speculate as to what will happen to them. The only way they will make it through is if they start educating themselves by actually doing the things that will gain them skills. It doesn't do any good for the kids by just telling them stories. The parents in my time took their kids all over so they could learn by watching and doing things with them. The kids won't learn by hearing how things are done.

It's not too late if some people around here could start some kinds of cultural activities for the kids. So they can learn some basic skills on survival. I notice the kids today don't care too much about stuff like that. There are just a few that still take their kids out. They need to start somewhere while there is still time to get them prepared. We still have our land and resources out there today. That's the best place for them to learn the ways of fishing, trapping, and hunting. There are people that still have the skills to pass on to them. Once they begin to grasp these teachings then they have a better chance of maintaining their livelihood anywhere.

Why did the people move to a new location where the community is today?

One of the reasons is probably because it was too bare. [There was a] lack of trees where we lived in the old community. They wanted to be where there are lots of trees. So one day they decided it was time to establish a new community away from the old one. Ever since we've been here, I noticed the trees that used to be around us are getting scarce. People are cutting all kinds of trees, even the green ones, for firewood. That's why they are going so fast. It was like being in the middle of the lake during the cold season. [That's] how bitterly cold it was when it was windy on the island where we once lived. They wanted to move to a place where the land was better to live in and have easier access to resources like trees.

There used to be lots of people back then but they moved away to other communities. I don't think it all had to do with the way they got along. Even though we had everything there when we moved we just left them there. We had a church on the island too.



Neskantaga

One of the local men went to check the area and marked where the new community was to be established. The thing I don't understand is the way it was marked, by line cutting all around the community. I don't know if that's all we are allowed for our community to be that size. It's not a whole lot. If that's the

case then how are the people going to be able to continue hunting if they go past where it's marked. I never hear anybody talk about what this all means. I never asked the local authority to explain it to me. As I said before I was never into any political stuff. I don't attend any of their meetings. I never really felt the need to get involved with it because all I wanted to do was just go out there and fend for myself.

I don't have any other questions to ask you, but if you have other things that you want to share, you're welcome to do so.

The most important thing that I think about is the children today. They need to be taught while there is still time. Get people to take them out and show them about how it's done to learn the ways of survival. Have them stay out there and live off the land. It would be good to have these guys who are skilled in this way to teach them all they know. As for myself, I can't do these things anymore. I'm too old now. I know we have people here that could do it. I believe this is the only way they will learn. They don't have to go very far, maybe just a short distance where people have their camps out there. There is lots to do out there too, like canoeing and cutting wood with an axe and a saw but leave the power tools home. [Have them do] something that's not too easy to do, just the things that could challenge them. People nowadays just don't have that motivation. They just don't have that drive. It's not like they can't walk around. It's just that they don't discipline themselves in that way. Kids today depend on things that run on power for them. They probably don't even know how to handle an axe to cut wood. These are some of the basic things they need to learn. When they go to a place in a big boat like near the rapids, they just sit there looking at the scenery. We didn't have things like that. We had to work by using a stick to push along our canoe by the rapids. There was no need for a paddle either. A stick was enough to guide our way through a set of rapids. I'm referring to these things that required physical strength. They also pulled their sleds as they were traveling by foot as far as twenty miles away. They didn't have to worry about anything else as long as they took along some of the things they needed while they're out there. Everything else they needed was always there for them like the boughs from the trees for their bedding when they had to make camp on the way. I did these things too when I was young. Now when I want to go somewhere, I go outside where my ski-doo is. All I do is start it up and it does all the work for me. [It's the] same thing when I cut wood. I have the power saw to

help me get it done faster. Things are so much easier compared to what it was before. The kids today are losing out on these experiences unless they want to learn to do them. They have no idea how to do even a simple thing like paddling around the lake. It would be so amazing if one day people arrived in their canoes to the community. Just like the way they did before with all their family members when they came back from their camps.

Kelvin Moonias

(recorded March 1, 2004)



Biographic Information

Name: Kelvin Peter Gregory Moonias

Date of Birth: January 22, 1974

Place of Birth: Sioux Lookout

Present Address: Lansdowne House

Education: Grade 8

Interests/Hobbies: Music, Sports, and Working with Youth

Community or reserve life in the past

(1) Describe your life in your community or reserve in the past.

I was born in Sioux Lookout just south of here. I was raised here on this reserve east of there. We moved to this community recently. We relocated. I was raised here my whole life. There were times in my life that I moved to Thunder Bay because my parents lived there for a while. My dad Peter worked there. I have three brothers and one sister. I had two sisters but one sister passed away in 2000 through suicide. I grew up in the 80s in those days. I basically remember how things went when I was a youth in those days and the way it was like. There was a little bit of stuff that was happening. I grew up playing on a hockey team. I played baseball in those days anyway. I like to play sports, all kinds of sports.

Then I ran into drug and alcohol problems in the 90s. A lot of young people were going into that especially the dropouts. I'm more into school and education. You have to have it because I'm having a hard time getting jobs. I'm lucky to have this kind of job as a youth coordinator today. That's what I try to tell the kids at school I talk to once in awhile.

In the 90s, I ran into drugs and alcohol. I also attempted suicide a few times. I wanted to end it because I had a lot of issues to deal with. I wanted to finish school. I wanted to do all kinds of stuff in my life. I was disappointed. I had a lot of expectations from myself and my parents, of course, and my teachers. That

was a load to carry. Then I fell into this depression or disappointment. That's the way my life has been, I think anyway, but along the way there was some good stuff I did. Sometimes it's hard to find good stuff in the past that I did but I have to look very carefully to find them. I usually tell myself, "come on, Kelvin you turned out ok," just to keep myself up there and to be happy. I think these things have helped me as a youth coordinator so that these kids nowadays to have a good transition from the school we have here and for them to continue to high school. These boys and girls are lucky today. They have all kinds of programs. Sometimes I envy them as we didn't really have these in those days.



Neskantaga Community Centre

Do you lead a traditional life?

Back in the 80s, I went to my first sweat lodge. There was an elder here that used to do that. He's still here though, but he doesn't do sweats anymore. He's still into that but he doesn't do that anymore. I used to like his sweats. That's where I first went into a sweat lodge. I have an Indian name, it's Great Wolf. Some medicine man came here. I forget his name. I was about 11 or 12 [years old] I think when I saw a shaking tent back in Lansdowne over there. They brought this medicine man in to do that stuff and that's where I got my Indian name. It was a pretty good ceremony. I liked it and I got into it. I started going to sweat lodges. I looked up to that elder there. I wanted to run sweat lodges when I grew up, when I got older. Off and on I would go (to the sweat lodge). But then I went

to high school and from there I kind of lost it. I was more into drugs and alcohol. I started drinking when I was still very small, I had my first drink when I was five years old, but it was an accidental drink, I guess. I was grabbing my dad's leftovers. I just thought it was juice and I drank it. My dad was out somewhere passed out. I drank that thing but I had no idea what it was. I guess I was running around, my mom was telling me, in circles and all of a sudden I fell down and passed out. She smelled my breath and she wondered how come I smelled like alcohol. That was my first drink. I kind of got into it when I was nine or 10. I was off and on that stuff. I also got into gas sniffing. When I got introduced to traditional ways, I really loved it and I liked going there. I was into it but then I had to leave my community to go to school. I didn't know where to go from there. I didn't know anyone back in those days in Thunder Bay, but I guess there was a lot of stuff like that around in the city. When I came home, I got into it. I was introduced to a pow wow. I went to a pow wow in Thunder Bay. I liked what they were doing . . . drumming and I wanted to get into that. But I didn't know how. I thought I would have to be a medicine man or something. I didn't know who to ask because around here we only had a sweat lodge. I don't think anybody knew but I didn't ask. There was never any mention about drum groups but they had hand drums. I wanted one too. I just didn't know how to get it. I had dreams about those things too. When I went to a treatment centre, I met this old man, an elder whom I still dream about. I asked him about these things. I went to treatment when I was 16. When I was 18, I went back in there again. I went down south to Minneapolis and other places. When I was in Wendamaagen, as it used to be called, that's where I got introduced to drumming. I'm glad I went to that treatment centre because today I wouldn't have been where I am right now. Right away when I got introduced, I knew it was right for me to do that. Harvey Churchill, an elder and counselor of mine at one time, introduced me to those things. I was really into them. He was a good fellow. He passed away about five years ago, I think. There was another guy named Paul who had a drum. He also helped me. He taught me how to make drum sticks and how to keep the drum. He showed me many things when I was in there. I told him that I was stuck and that I wanted to drum. I wanted to sound like them. It took me awhile to get into singing. I remember one time when I was coming home from treatment, I brought a drum stick home. I knew a lot of people wanted that drum stick. Lots of people asked me where I got that stick. The young people said that it looked very nice and asked if I could teach them

. . . One day a young individual asked me if I would be interested in drumming and I said sure. We had no drum and I went to a pow wow. There was a suicide up in Webequie. I went there and there was a mini pow wow, just a little ceremony. They gave this young fellow a drum. I don't know how he got it. He's just few years younger than I. I was so happy when he received a drum so we could sing together. It was a contemporary drum that looks like a base drum, the ones with metal. That was our first drum. We were willing to use anything given to us. So they had a ceremony. A medicine man was there and he said that these young guys need a drum . . . That's when he was given the drum, just for him to get started over here. So we started that. This other fellow came in and asked me if I wanted to drum. Everybody was into that. A lot of young people wanted to drum and we didn't have enough room. There were maybe 20 or 30 of us that would want to drum. We had to take turns in order to share the drum. We would have different practices at different times. They would also wait for their turn to drum and sing. The thing where we made a mistake was that we went too fast. We wanted things to happen overnight. So it kind of stopped because we ran into a brick wall where alcohol and drugs were controlling us. A lot of us would drink the night before we went drumming and we had no teacher. We just grabbed that thing so it kind of stopped. We had pow wows here but that also slowed down and then eventually stopped. There hasn't been a pow wow here since like four or five years already. I think many people got turned off. I don't blame them because we were doing drugs and alcohol plus drumming at the same time. People didn't like that and we kind of turned them off. Now it's slowly coming around again. They have practices here once or twice a month and there are a few groups here that are practicing. I'm a drum keeper too. It (the drum) is called Little Wolf. That's where I used to drum. I had a vision one day and I would like to share a story. This is where the name for our drum group came from. I still keep the drum and we're still interested but I haven't sung for a while anyway. I stopped when I lost my sister through suicide because I became resentful and angry at this thing . . . this traditional stuff because nothing worked. I didn't think it would ever happen to my family like my brothers or sisters. I trusted them not to do that. I thought we had a good family. We had good communication and all that. My parents are good parents. That's what they are and they are still are good parents. They've been good to me and I thought we wouldn't go through suicide until one day there was a knock on my door. I was living in Thunder Bay at that time. There were a lot of

disputes happening (about who was going to be chief). Leaders and third parties were involved. But it's not as bad as it was. The year 2000 was when I lost my sister. That's when I threw everything away. My brothers and I got rid of my drum. I got somebody else to keep it and all the things that I had received, my eagle feathers. I was supposed to make a bustle for me to dance. I had a dream about that too. I didn't want them anymore because I believed they took my sister away from me. So I was blaming them. I blamed those traditional ways. I kind of went into a binge that I really don't want to talk about. The thing is I got into gospel that was ok for me anyway. It brought me here today. I'm just going to get into that but I'm not criticizing. I'm an open-minded person. I got into gospel singing and I had a good feeling towards it. I liked to sing any kind of music. That's one of my hobbies. I like to sing pow wow and all kinds of stuff like rock and country music. My three brothers and I got together as musicians. We have a band together called the Moonias Brothers Gospel Band. That's how we got started because I wanted to play with my brothers and sing gospel music. I think that's what kept us together through the hard times along with our sister who has been supporting us as well as our parents. When we are short of instruments, they would help us, just to keep [us] going, to keep [us] moving forward. I think that's the way they helped us whenever we were short of something. They tried to provide in some way. My brother, who is a fiddler, goes around the north. [He] plays fiddle music, doing dances, and all that along with my other brothers. What kept us alive is the music. It might not work for some people but I think that's what kept us together as a family. My parents like to listen to all kinds of songs and I feel good when I sing too. That's where my brothers are too. They want to move on. I believe music has kept us together in the last few years. We never had that when my sister was alive. I didn't know that I was distant from my brothers but it was good. The music that I really enjoyed playing kept us together. I play the keyboard in the band and I sing. I'm learning how to play guitar. It's been a few years already but I'm not there yet. I'm left-handed. I'm trying to learn how to play this way. The reason why I can't play this way is this thing here. . . . When I was a kid I didn't listen to my mom to watch the door. All of a sudden there was a gust of wind and it cut off my finger. I laugh at it today. So I'm trying to learn how to play guitar this way and that's why it takes so long for me to learn.

Today we go around to gospel jamborees in the nearby communities. We also hold gospel jamborees here. When I was first introduced into it there's been a lot of change in our youth. There was a World Youth Day here back in 2001, I think. They brought in a big Holy cross here. I think that's when a lot of change was happening after we held our first youth gospel jamboree. From then until now there's been change in our youth. There hasn't been a suicide since we lost two girls, my sister and [one from] the other Moonias family. It was just one week of each other. That was one of the hardest days that I faced. I could feel for them, the other family. I could feel their pain even though I didn't know them on those other reserves when they lose someone they love through suicide. I could feel their pain, especially around here too when I know those people who lost someone to suicide. I could feel by the way they look. I could feel them hurting. They want to talk to someone. That's the way I am sometimes. Recently, I went to this suicide prevention workshop. I kind of went down. I thought I was ready to attend. It was very informative and [they talked about] all the things I didn't know. Today I'm glad I'm standing here. I think I can help a lot of young people when they are going through these things like being able to recognize the symptoms of suicide like depression and other things. We have gospel jamborees two or three times a year which is good. Our youth are involved in that. We are talking about having another pow wow here again this summer.

I want to talk about this thing first. I'm very open-minded because I've been criticized about why I have to have two religions. I want to get into traditional ways and I want to get into gospel. I don't want to take sides. So I asked one of the elders in the community. This guy knows some stuff like traditional ways. He is very open-minded. The reason I say open-minded is some people can't take, like why are we fighting about religion? There is only one God. That's what I believe in. So I asked this guy because I was confused but today I am still confused. So I asked him, why are we fighting. This man is quite traditional and very open-minded. He's not against these things. I got turned off a couple of times when I went to sweat lodges and church services because I hear all about religion. They only speak from the Bible but then again these church people say that it is Satanism or it is Satan's religion. That's what they are fighting about from both sides. That's what put me off. It will work when you use it right. That's the way I believe it. I'm into traditional ways and I'm also into the Bible, like gospel singing and all that. I see there is no wrong in this. So I went to this

elder because I was confused. I asked him if it is all right if I join in these two. That's the way a lot of young people are. They don't want to take sides. I think it works for me and I don't really care what anyone says anymore. I go to church to sing gospel songs as well as to sweat lodges. I would like to go to pow wows again to drum. I like the way the drum beats when I hear it. When I sit there, I know it's right for me and when I sing at gospel jamborees I know it's right for me. That's the way I want to take it. If it works for my dad, then it's ok. I didn't realize it before when this elder said, "look at your dad, he's into gospel singing and traditional ways. It works for him and he's been sober for 20 some years." What he said, opened my eyes. So that's the way I want to go too. There is only one God. So that's the way I believe in. That's what I'm hoping, for these young people to have that understanding. I know they are confused too as well as many other people about the religion. Some people say it is bad because of what happened to them in residential schools. It's these older people that went to these schools that say the church is bad or the sweat lodge is bad. It's those people that tell us these things but some of them are ok about it. It's those people that don't want to change. That's why I think they are talking about residential schools. I attended some of those meetings. I felt very uncomfortable but I have to because I want to learn about what happened to them and all that.

We are going to pow wows again. We hear about them in some of the meetings. We've been wanting to get into that again. We're hoping to have a teacher. We have one here in the community already. We are just taking it slow, [not] like before we just rushed into it. We didn't know anything about it. We used to go to every pow wow [during] that first three months when we first got into it. Now we are going into it slowly. We are trying to get educated in that thing. We want to learn why there was a drum and other related things. We never had that teaching as nobody really knew these things and about the purpose of these songs and the meaning of them. We used to just sing any song but we didn't have that understanding of them. We didn't sing the proper songs at the ceremonies. We just rushed into it. That's what my life has been kind of like. Sometimes I have big expectations on things. I want them overnight. I'm slowly changing anyway.

I have these young people that want to get into drumming. I want to educate them first or I want to provide them an educator that knows these things before

they get into it. I don't want them to make the same mistakes we made. That's the way I want to approach it. That's the way I want them to approach it. There are other kids that want to get into musical instruments. I also want them to take it slow. These things are very expensive so we have to be careful. The young people today have these programs now where they could get into easily. They just have to take advantage of it and that's what I tell them. We didn't have those [things] when I was young. I think the young people today are more educated in life about what they need to do. They know more about what's right and wrong but they still get into trouble. But that's young people. They are only young. We sometimes tend to have high expectations for them. I think that's where we got to stop, let them enjoy themselves, and keep providing these programs that they could get into.

I hold boys only and girls only nights and boys and girls nights three times a week. A lot of people are involved in this too. I'm starting to have volunteers for them. These weekly activities that we hold for boys and girls are starting to bring in young people. I'm very happy it's ongoing. I have arranged a little workshop for them to attend tomorrow night. We will talk about the facts of life as well as other things in life that we feel they should be informed of. We try to educate them more in terms of what to expect when they go to high school or if they move to live in another town. I'm not saying it's bad to live in town but for them to be aware of [things]. There is some good stuff that happens in Thunder Bay or wherever they go to school. They just have to take advantage of those things. They have road access to attend pow wows and gospel jamborees and all that. So there's a lot of stuff like that out there. I know there are floor hockey nights and other activities like that. What we try to teach them here, for example, is safe sex, sexuality, and all those teachings about respect. Some of the staff also visits the school to help promote these teachings as well as other issues that affect them. There has been a lot of teasing before but it has stopped. Today all the youth want is attention, that's all. Just give them two hours of your time. That's what I do for them almost every night. Two hours of your time and they will be happy. That's what I noticed when I first started working. There was a lot of teasing and being disrespectful towards other people. I think there's been a change. All they need are a few hours of your time to take them out for floor hockey or volleyball or something. Just give them attention. I try to bring the youth together to join in for group activities. [I try to] spend time with them,

listen to what they are saying, and [find out] what they want in the community. If they want gospel jamborees, we will give them that. We just had one recently. Now they want a pow wow so we are going to have one this summer. That's what we are doing for them. They were just little kids the last time they saw a pow wow here. That's what they want to see again. They also want to go out in the bush. We are in a process of planning for that and it will happen. We are talking about when and where we will go. The girls wanted a broomball team that I had already started for them. They have a coach and they practice three or four times a week. I also ordered them sweaters. They really loved that. So hopefully they will get them before they head out to the tournament up in Webequie, just north of here. There will be a girls broomball tournament happening there. The thing that I'm most disappointed in are some of the parents who don't really support their kids in terms of sports. Most of them don't have adequate hockey equipment or have out grown them. Parents don't provide these things for their kids. I don't know how many times I have talked to parents. I don't have a budget to be able to provide the things they need. We tried fund raising for their hockey sweaters but it's on hold right now because there are only three or four that show up for practices. But they don't really mind because they know they are going to have it next year anyway. It's their parents that won't provide things for them that they need. There are enough [players] for a hockey team but they don't have the equipment. I tried to ask the parents but they only respond by saying we'll see what we can do. The girls are doing fine though.

I haven't really had the time for these older youths in my age category like 20 to 30 year olds. I'm too busy with the students in Grades 4 to 8. Those are the ones I'm concentrating on most because they are the ones who will be leaving their community soon to attend high school in the city. They will be faced with different things out there. There are mostly drop outs here, a high rate of drop outs, and that's why I'm concentrating on Grades 4 to 8 because I want them to finish school. I don't want them to go through what I went through in my life with a lot of regrets. I wish I could've finished school. I always think about this. You know my cousin finished high school. He's actually the only one who finished Grade 12 in this community. He went to college. He's the only one that I know in my community.

Did your parents teach you about hunting, fishing, or trapping?

Yes my dad used to take me out when I was young. I was between five and eight years old. I used to cry for my dad when he was heading out to the bush because I wanted to go too. I really liked when he took me out. I used to go trapping. He taught me to trap and hunt. He also taught me other things like how to make sling shots and stuff like that. My mom used to teach us how to catch and then cut up fish as well as beaver. I didn't really pay much attention to that. But I love hunting today. It feels good to be able to provide for your family in that way. After I dropped out of high school my parents moved to Thunder Bay. I had nobody to continue doing those things with. That's when my uncle came in. He started taking me out to the bush. He reminded me about the things to do in terms of hunting safety on gun use. I thank him for that and I respect him for that today. He would take me out every chance he got to teach me about hunting. We used to go trapping every fall and spring. I liked those outings but I don't see that around today. I would look forward to trapping. That was one of the good things I had in my life that I remember. I'll never forget those days. We even went out spring camping. We were taught, while we were out there, on how to make things and how to put up tents. We learned lots of stuff about how to keep ourselves safe, about how to be cautious while walking on the ice as it starts to thaw in the spring, and about other survival skills. This was when I got a bit older like nine years old. It was a good age to learn stuff like that. At that age you listen well to the parents. That's the way my dad was brought up and my mom too. They were taught how to live and survive off the land, and they in turn taught us those things. That's what I would like to teach my kids in that way too. Not basically to go out trapping but just for them to know there is a way to survive in the bush. What's going to be happening in the future is that there are lots of things coming. We know that for sure. There is more stuff that will be coming to this community like those lumber companies. So I want to teach my kids to live and to survive in the bush but then again I want them to go to school. I'm encouraging them to continue with that. I'm glad my parents and uncles taught me on how to survive in the bush. I don't trap as I haven't done that for a while but I still hunt and fish. I still do things my parents taught me.

I have three kids of my own. They are two, seven, and nine years old. I want to teach them what I learned from my parents.

I speak the language fluently. I love speaking my language. I never get tired of it and I'm glad I learned English too. I've been in an all Native school since I started. I couldn't really speak English when I went out to high school in Thunder Bay. This is when I talked about culture shock. I was shy and I missed my language while I was there. But there were other students from this community at that time. I talk to the elders in my language. I was talking to my grandmother when she was alive but there is a gap. Nowadays our language is kind of different from when they were speaking. I don't know how that is but I believe that because sometimes I couldn't understand what my grandmother was saying and she wouldn't understand what I'm saying. But we would try to fix it up. Older people would ask me where did you get that language? We try to speak our language anyway. We do speak it fluently here in our community. But the younger ones today, some of the students, don't really understand it. I try to talk to them in our language. Some do understand and others don't because some of these young parents speak to them in English. I'm a young parent too. Sometimes I do forget not to use English so much but I try to use it all the time at home so my kids will understand their Native language teacher too. I was taught Native language while I was in school. I grew up learning the language. The Native language teacher that we had went to school so she can teach it at the school. She would bring words that we didn't understand. I think that's how I used to confuse my grandmother because in my generation we learned new words taught to us. But we understand each other not to the point where people say, what?

You say that the language is on the decline. What do you think could be done to save the language and to keep it going?

I think we should talk to the parents because I think they need to be educated—even myself. I think that's where it stopped. The young parents or even our parents would rather speak to us in English now sometimes. It should start at the home because we have to teach our kids. I know I do that but I tend to forget sometimes. We would do this at home. I'll give you an example . . . both of us, my partner and I, said that we would always speak the language at our table at home even if it's just for an hour or two. That's what we do at home at least a couple of times a week. Nobody would speak, especially our kids. They are seven and nine but they would speak when they were around four or five years old. When they started going to school, that's when they started using English

more. It has to start at home and even at the school. I think our Native teachers have to speak to them in the language. I don't know of anything else but that's how I got started. It's working a bit. They understand what I'm saying and that's why I know it's working. [If] they just can't speak it, they would ask me like what is that word or how do you say cup in Ojibway. I like it when they do that. I think you have to keep an open mind with them. Sometimes they would get stuck on words but we tend to laugh at them, especially these young people. Nowadays they are very fragile. I think most of them are just too shy to speak it because they are being laughed at when they make a mistake or when they try to say something. So they are being laughed at. I see that sometimes. We have to stop laughing at them when they make a mistake, when they try to describe some things like simple words, or when they say it differently.



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So it has to start at home and [we have to] stop laughing at them and let them speak it. [We have to] let them speak their language. If they are not correct don't laugh at them. Maybe just tell them that this is how you pronounce it in a gentle way. I know I got embarrassed a few times too when I was young because I would mispronounce a couple of things. But I never showed my feelings. I think that's why the young prefer using English. We have to stop laughing at them because they want to speak their language. I know they know how to speak it.

They may have a few problems with words but at least they are trying and we're not.

I hear people say like the youth are going to be our future leaders. What's your perspective in that?

I believe that. I think they will be great leaders because they are more educated than us, than me anyway. I know we should respect our elders but I think we should also respect our young people because they are going to be the ones taking care of us. I know that. They are going to school, getting more educated, and getting more programs. [They are getting] the things that we didn't get and what our elders didn't get. They are going to be the ones taking care of us in the future. They are going to know more [about things] like computers. They are learning that at the schools now too. I think that's what the world is going to be like, just computers. I'm glad that they are learning more about computer stuff. I think that's the way the world is going to be soon. You can basically go anywhere with a computer. I'm hoping a couple of them will graduate and become lawyers in this community or even become doctors. I respect elders too. I think young people should start getting recognition because of what they are doing, what they are going to be doing, and what we are expecting from them. They have to finish school. I know some of them will. Some of them will be great leaders. I could just see that in them when I go to the school. Some of them are already great leaders. I think each and every one of us are leaders.

Did you ever hear your parents or the elders talk about the time when the treaty was signed here a long time ago?

Just bits and parts of it. I don't really remember them telling me but they would talk about it among themselves. My dad was a chief for 12 years back then. He is still a chief today. He is on his second term now. Sometimes I would eavesdrop. I used to just sit there while he talked to others especially the elders. The thing is the elders don't really talk about the past in this community. I don't know why but I hear elders talk about things in the other communities. I don't want to start saying maybe they are hiding something! When they talk about the past, they would talk about something else liking fishing. When you ask them about something, they would just talk about something else. I don't know why.

Community or reserve life today

(2) Describe your life in your community today.

Today my life is very busy and I like it. I have three kids. I live with my girlfriend. I have a two-year-old son, and two girls age seven and nine. I got this job on November 10 as a youth coordinator this last year. I see a lot of change in this community. Like I said before there was a political dispute here back in the late 90s to the year 2000. Today it has settled down. There are a few things but nothing to get excited about. There are programs for youth. There are lots of things for youth to do and for myself I see many changes in our youth. That's where I'm concentrating on mostly. There hasn't been a suicide for four years and that is very good. At the rate we were going in the 90s, it was like almost every year we had a suicide here. I'm not saying we are perfect but there's been many changes in our youth. We have been helping them and we have been there for them. We also started programs for them. We do a little bit of fund raising for them and they help us. We get them involved or even run workshops for them. Now they are running their own gospel jamboree. We got them started. Now I don't even have to do anything. All I do now is go [there] and sing. They run everything. That's what they wanted to do. The thing in the community here is, I think, the chief and council's support. The thing I like about it is when these young people quit their jobs, they would be hired back on again. I like that because it shows that they are not quitting on their youth. They would hire them again to do something else. They try to give them what they like or what they are good at. They want to see their youth and what they are good at. There are a few that don't want to get involved but some of them eventually came around. Some of them just want to be left alone.

As for myself, hopefully I helped someone. When I was asked to do this, I didn't know what to say but I said I would do it.

This place where the community is right now, is it a new one?

Yes.

Do you know why the move was made from the old reserve?

I know my dad was involved in this. There were many others like Leo Moonias but I can't name all of them. I was just a kid when they started talking about it and it took them awhile to get people going. We were living in a swamp. I

remember that. But the Northern Store, all the other government run buildings, and the church had good land. They had the best land there. I remember going to these meetings. I was just a kid then around nine or 10. My dad used to have general meetings about relocation, where, when and if it's possible to move. I remember my dad was already a chief then when they started talking about it. Lots of people were involved in that. There were some who were against it. But then again those people who were against it were the first ones to move there (laughs). They kind of went in a hole and I think that's probably one of the reasons why we were in third party management. The government promised us things would get moving. Then we just started spending money building the houses because the government promised us that it would put money there.

For me, I try not to get into politics. That's what I heard when I was growing up. I grew up listening to my dad and he used to take me to meetings. I was just a kid. He had to take me with him because I wasn't listening to my mom.



Neskantaga First Nation Band Office

Community or reserve life in the future

(3) Describe what your life might be like in your community or reserve in the future.

. . . Hopefully I will have a good life. I'm expecting a lot of things for myself, good things. I know I'm going to change, I have to change a few things in my

life that I have to deal with. The reserve itself is changing. I know that for sure because I was there in the 80s and 90s until today. There were lots of problems being hidden but they brought them out in the open already. We are changing and I think because we are changing then in turn our youth are changing too. That's where it has to come from I think. I listen to the council that are young and they are more into their youth, They are concentrating on their youth because they are the future. I believe that when people say our youth are our future. Like I said they have things going for them and things coming for them. We just have to educate them and prepare them. I think they will do good, our youth, here in our community. Our elders will have to start listening and start giving credit to the youth because they've been trying. A couple of our elders like to put down our youth. I don't know if they try to help them by being that way towards them. We have to stop that. I'm worried about the put downs in our community. We are going to ruin lives if we keep doing that.

In the future, I see myself drumming and bringing pow wows and gospel jamborees. [I see] religions getting along and youth and elders getting along as one. Right now we are slowly going in the same direction now. One day we are going to join together. It's not all a bed of roses here but we are trying now, at least we are trying. Our youth are more educated now and they are more understanding. Even our elders are slowly coming around. They are starting to talk. That's about it I guess.

What kind of construction plans do they have that you know of?

Right now they are about to finish the lagoons. The other thing I keep hearing is they are going to renovate the arena that they haven't finished yet. I think our youth want a better arena than what they gave us before. They just need to put a roof over it. They are supposed to fix the arena this summer. We just got a store here and that's what we wanted. The other one I hear about is the administration office. Right now I don't know when this will happen. We are also talking about having a baseball field. So hopefully we will get that this summer. We are in third party [management] so we don't have too many things going for us. We just have the six housing units finished. It took them awhile. They kind of have to stall once in a while because of a lack of funding. That's where we are at this time in terms of third party management. We are very limited in doing things because of the limited budget. They probably would've finished the arena a long

time ago. The government promised us that they would put money in there which we never received. Hopefully they will stop lying to us soon.

Do you feel there is a lack of accommodations here for people who come here in this community?

Yes, that's the other thing. I'd like to see a hotel here because we get lots of visitors especially in the summer. We have lots of workshops now. There was hardly any of that in the past. We are generating some money by having people coming here in this reserve. We host many meetings here too. The chiefs would always come here. So I think they should build a hotel, a place for you guys to stay. They always have a hard time accommodating people here. I hear that every day as there are people coming in just about every day, either government workers, NAN people, Nodin councillors, Tikinagan workers, or environmental workers. Sometimes we don't have a place to put them up. We have to put them at somebody's home. Some of them don't mind though. But you know when I go to town I would like to have a place to stay. I'm sure that's the same way for you guys. You probably would like your own room! I think they should start talking about putting up a hotel in this community. There are people coming in constantly especially police officers and others that come to do workshops and provide information for us like NAN workers. I think it would be a good business for a First Nation to get into or anybody who wants to get into that.

You mentioned earlier about people coming in here doing exploration like those mining companies. Do you know if there are any resources around in this area?

I recently took a prospector's training [course]. I believe there are resources up north from us here. There was a mining company that went there to do drilling, about 50 miles away from here. It's where I hunt on the land. They told us that they were going to be there for only one week to do exploring. But they were there for a whole year and they didn't let us know. Two years came around and we finally told them to leave. A couple of us went there and told them to leave so they left. We hold meetings here.

I forgot to mention this, I heard from the meetings I usually go to that they are talking about an all season road and that it's going to be here soon. Eventually it will come. We are preparing for that. They sent out about 19 youth to obtain their driver's license. The chief and council provided them transportation and

there were only nine of us that passed. They are sending ten more out. We are just slowly preparing ourselves for the road. We know it's coming and the lumber companies will do anything because we have lots of trees around here that we'd like to protect. We will protect them. We told the mining company to get out of our land.

Do you think it would be a good idea if somebody could get a sawmill going here?

That would be nice because there is one person who has the machine that makes 2 by 4s or 2 by 6s. He has that but he hasn't taken advantage of it. He's very good at it but I wish more young people would get involved. This guy is getting old. Training should be provided for these young people to get into it. We know a lumber company is coming especially in that area over there. We have trees that the company is looking for. We need to be prepared. [We also need] training about mining. There were only eight of us who took that prospector's training. It was mostly young people. That's what I notice about this community. Young people would rather get more involved than these people in their 40s and 50s. They don't seem to want to get into this. But these younger ones from age 16 right up to the early 30s go to these workshops. Even for the crisis team, these young people would tackle those things. They would go to other reserves to help out. It's the young people all the time. I remember one time I was a crisis team coordinator here for a couple of days. We were trying to round up the people to go to Fort Hope that went through a loss. I asked the older people first but they said no. They don't want to go. Then I turned to the young people and they eagerly agreed to go. They did a pretty good job. Even these workshops that we have, young people are always attending them, which is good. Some of them even went to heavy equipment training. That's a big success. Those are the ones you see driving around. I think the older people should still get involved just as much as these younger ones. That's why I believe young people are our future leaders and they are showing that. They are starting to have jobs now. They are starting to be responsible too.

Is there anything else you would like to add or say?

I just like to thank you . . . but I don't even know your name (laughs). I had a good talk. It's true when people say that young people are our future. I believe that too. What I was just saying [is that] all of them are getting involved in these things like workshops and training. They are showing it. They are trying. We

tend to put them down sometimes but I hope they don't give up. I work with a lot of them here in the community. I tell them to keep on going. They are doing their part. They are involved in anything like crisis team workshops and any other kind of workshops. I know there is a workshop happening across from us. There are quite a few who are going there. These people are only in their 20s. They are trying. I needed volunteers for girls night and guess who I asked: the young ladies. They said sure they will do it. We started a program for girls up to Grade 8 to do something at the gym like exercise and other stuff. I tried asking the older people but they always refuse.

Is this going to be the generation that's going to make things happen?

I believe so. I hope I'm helping them and if I can help one person that's good with me. There are great things for us in the future. We have to take advantage of them, like the training [programs] that are happening provided by NAN, Mattawa, or the chief and council. We need to take advantage of them and that's what we are doing. We are the ones, maybe not me, but it might be somebody else, who will be the next leaders. It's starting to show already. When you go to a nomination meeting when we make our council there are mostly young people who are being nominated. That's how I know people are starting to change. They are moving on. In the past, there were a couple of young people who were already in the council. It's a slow process. There is this person and we know that already he's going to be our chief in the future. We know already. I know he's going to be our next chief within the next couple of years down the road. [He's] the one I went to school with, the one who finished high school. He is very smart. He knows what he's doing. I grew up with him. My dad raised him. I know he's going to be the next chief. A lot of people respect him. He's only 32 years old. He's pretty good. So we know already and I know for sure who's going to be chief in four or five years time or even earlier. It might not even be next year as our general election is coming up but I won't be surprised because a lot of our young people are getting nominated to run as a council. Some of them declined though because they think they are not ready. I do respect that. I got nominated a few times too, which I declined. I'm not ready. I want to help young people first. I believe I can help young people as much as being a counsellor than being a band council[lor] or chief.

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The purpose of the book is to highlight the past and present life experiences of elders and youth in the northern Matawa communities of Eabametoong (Fort Hope), Marten Falls (Ogoki Post), and Neskantaga (Lansdowne House). In addition, this book identifies the aspirations of these communities and reserves as described by the participants.

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